SPECIAL REPORT: STATE *of the* UNION

THE Atlantic

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008

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AFTER IRAQ

WHAT WILL THE MIDDLE EAST LOOK LIKE?

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

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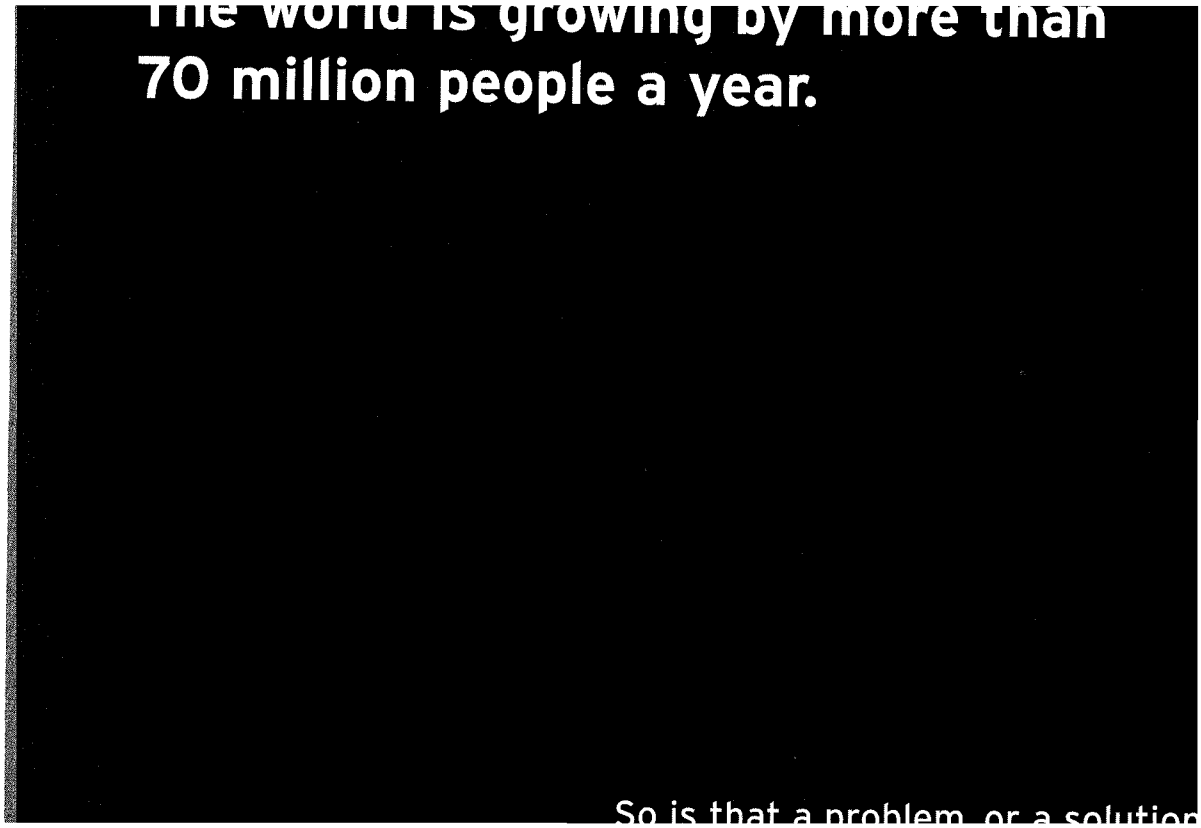

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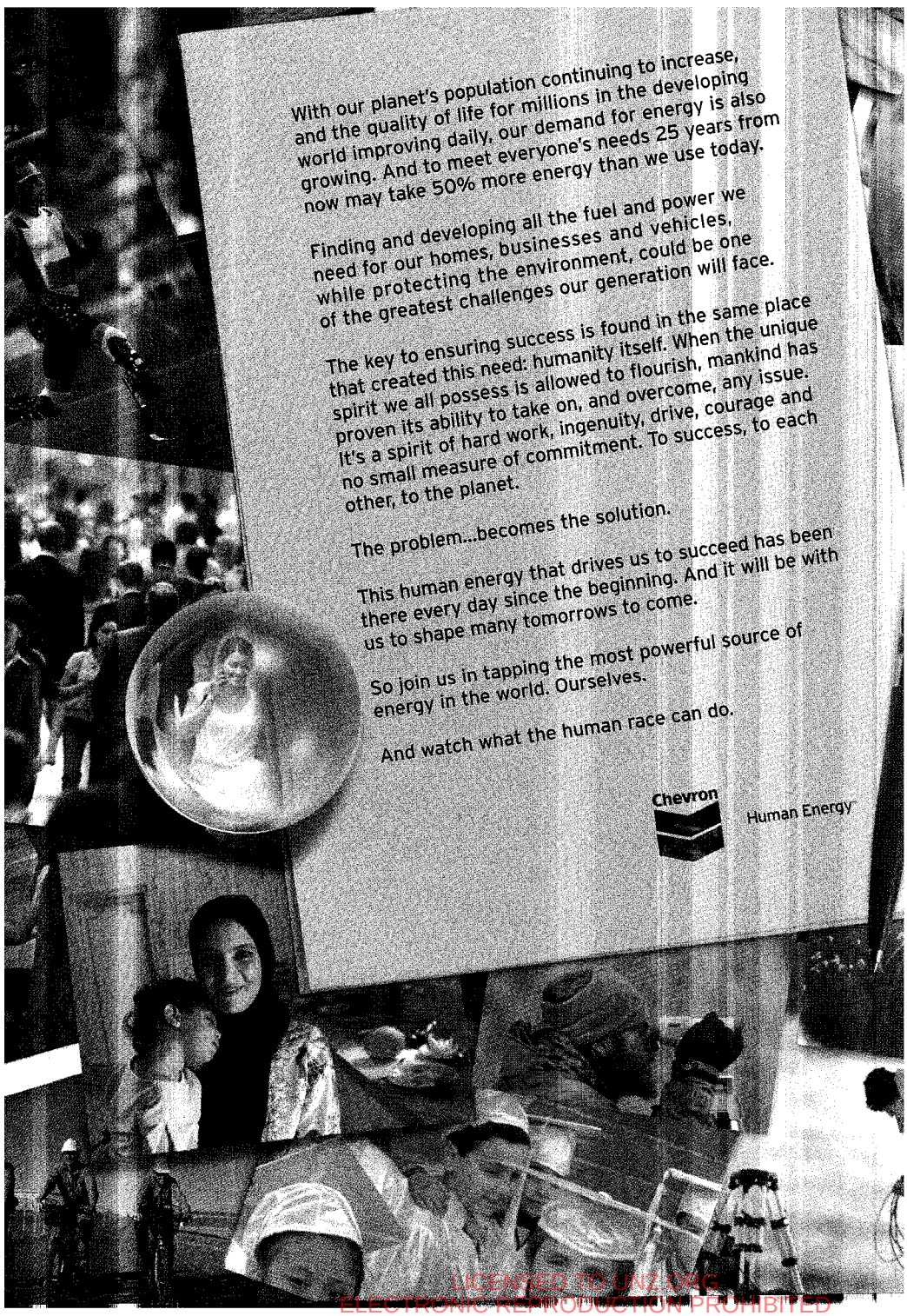

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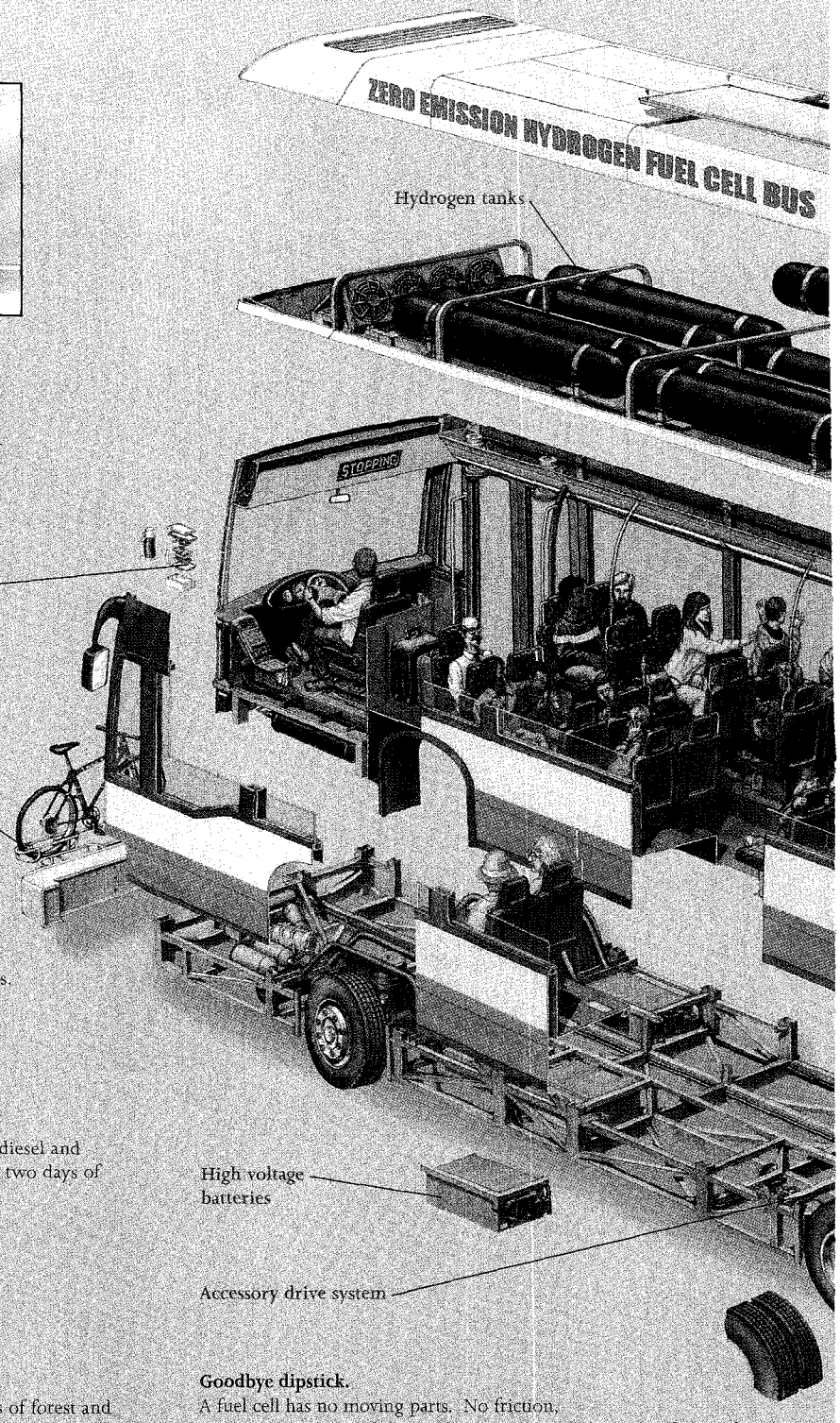

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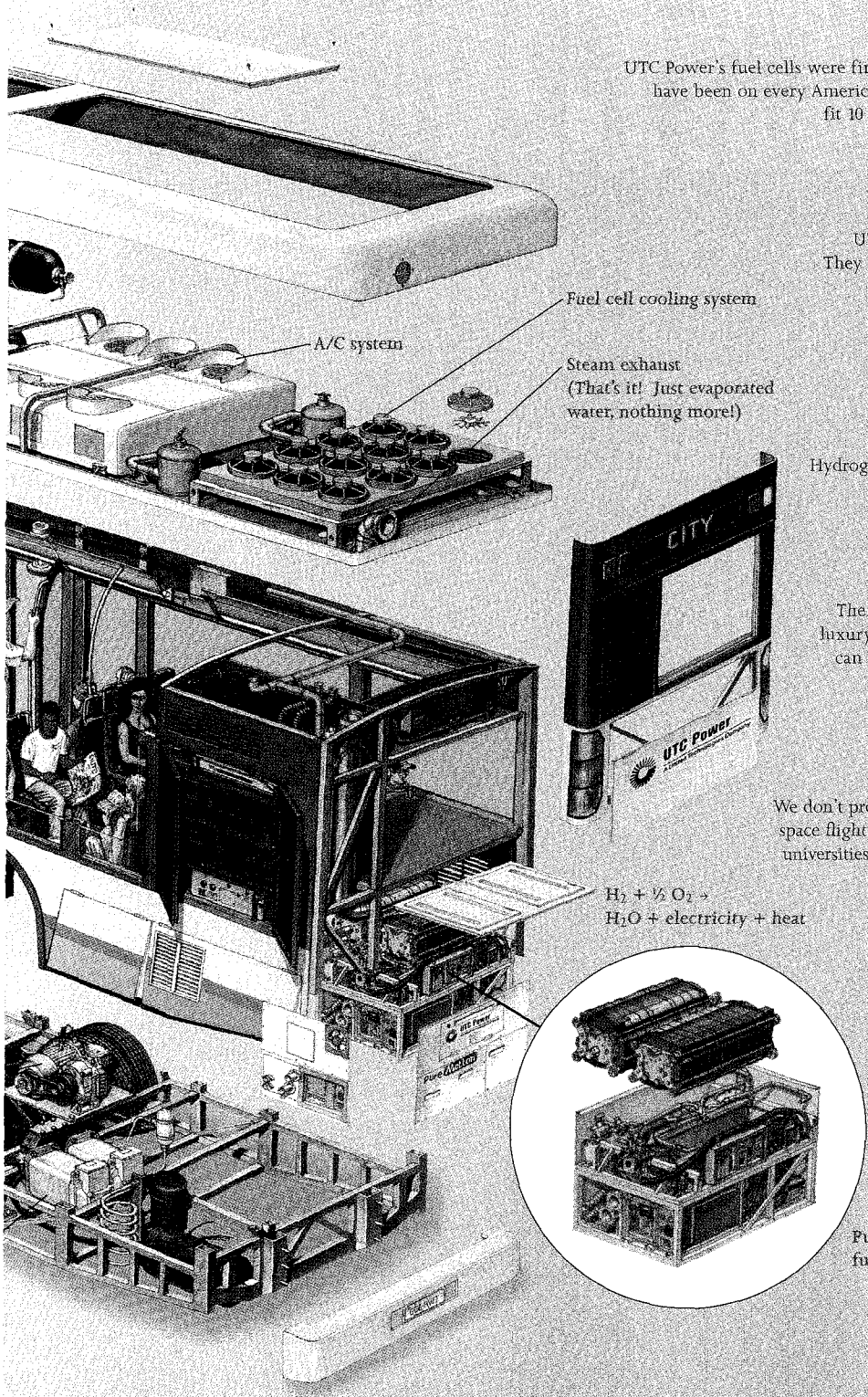

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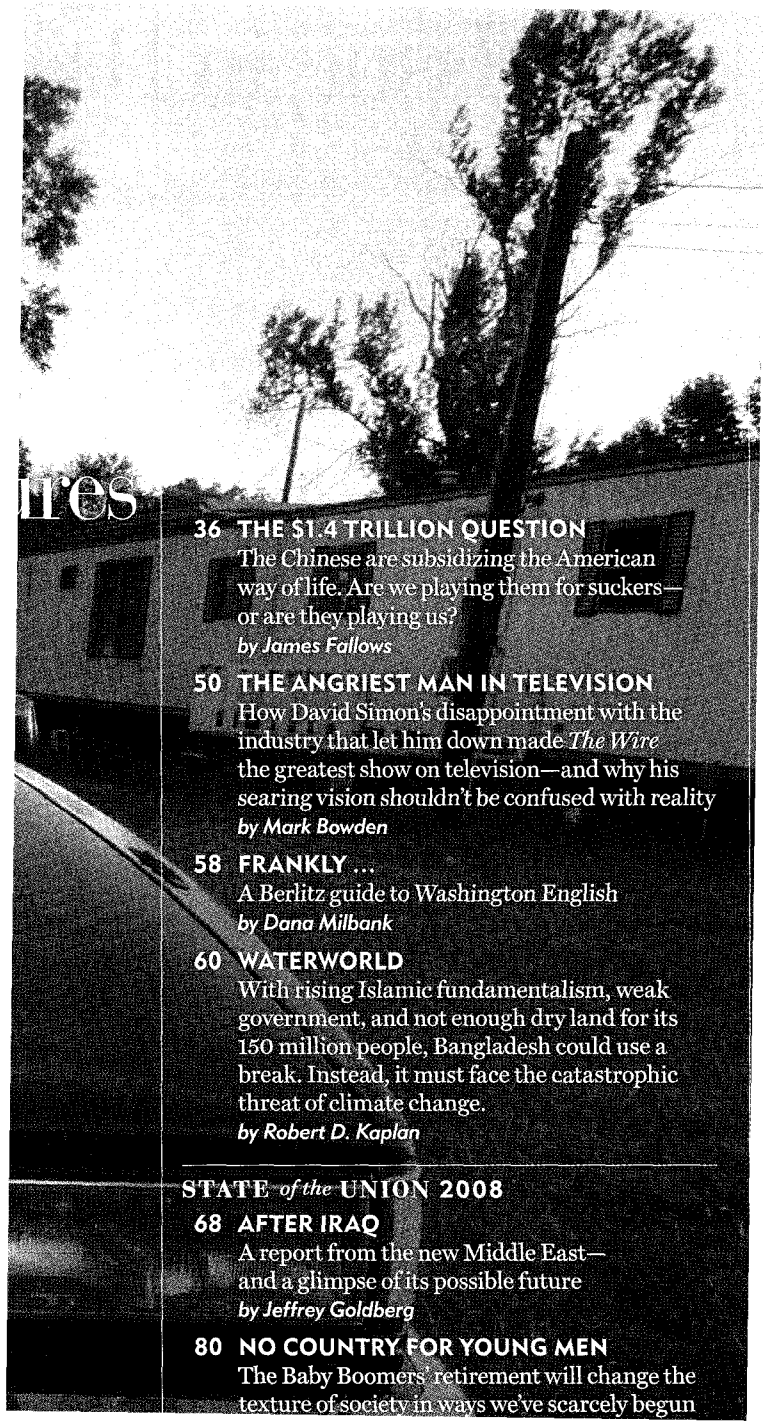

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008 | VOLUME 301 | NUMBER 1

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REUTERS/SEAN GARDNER

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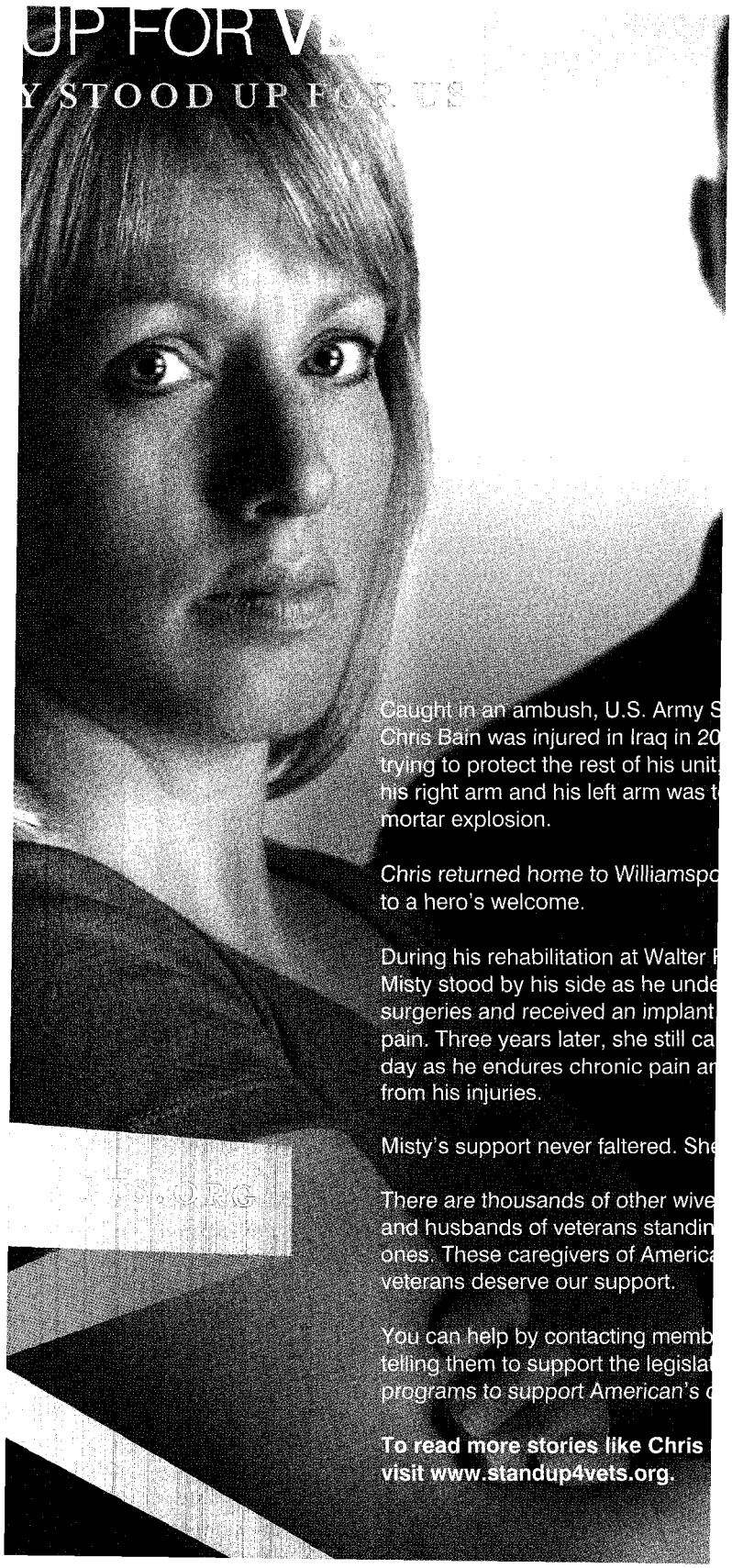

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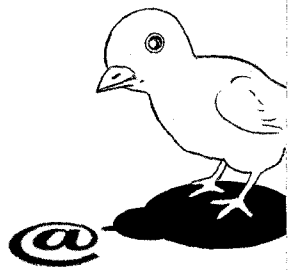

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GOD AND HOLLYWOOD

Hanna Rosin's hatchet job on my film of Philip Pullman's novel *The Golden Compass* ("How Hollywood Saved God," December *Atlantic*), and by extension on me, is so comprehensive in its disdain that one might go so far as to imagine she had seen the movie!

She hasn't, of course, though that fact was not mentioned in her assemblage of carefully cut-and-pasted quotes and surmises pumped up with paraphrase. For example, it is true that I said that clerics and religious people had been presented as boobs and hypocrites in many Hollywood films in the past few decades. But her statement that this was, to me, an "explanation for why [I'm] not selling out" is her own invention. We were talking about entirely different things at that point in our interview, and the notion that I somehow regard myself as doing the religious right a solid is grotesque.

Elsewhere she simply seems not to have finished her background reading. If she had got to the end of my script, she might have noticed that the Genesis story she says I have stricken from the movie is addressed, though in the mouth of the villain Mrs. Coulter. "A long time ago, one of our ancestors made a terrible mistake. They disobeyed the Authority. And that is what brought Dust into the world. And ever since then, we've been sick. Sick with evil—sick with Dust." It shouldn't take much for somebody with half a brain to understand the import, and Rosin, who writes about theology, ought to be able to catch it. But evidently it didn't suit her thesis, which is that I "sold out" the book I happen to love. What did I sell? Who sold the rights to the books? Not me.

From the article, we discover all sorts of new and interesting information—Hollywood studios are afraid of controversy! Actors sometimes don't have an easy time answering press questions!—and some fascinating paradoxes. A page after a lengthy description of religious imagery in the film, we find a picture in which one of the characters "flies over a land denuded of religious imagery." Eh? I suppose one can blame an overenthusiastic caption writer for that one.

It has been an interesting experience to be accused, in the same month, of forwarding the aims of a stealth-atheist conspiracy and of selling out the secular ideals of a great work of literature. Thank you for expanding my sense of the absurd!

Chris Weitz
Los Angeles, Calif.

Hanna Rosin replies:

Comprehensive disdain? Certainly not. What I conveyed was more a sigh of resignation. The second half of Chris Weitz's letter captures the spirit of my story more accurately than the first. Yes, we all know Hollywood is afraid of controversy. And here is a particularly choice example of that instinct in action.

I never said Weitz sold out the books. It was plain, in both our interview and my story, that he loves them. I merely described the delicate process by which he reconciled the books with the needs of a Hollywood studio. "Kidnap the book's body and leave behind its soul," is what I wrote. The script contains all the rich characters and adventures of the books. But not, as I explained, the deeply subversive anti-God message. Is that a surprise? Probably not. I don't think anyone expects a Hollywood studio to make a $180 million holiday-season movie that trashes the Old Testament.

At the time I wrote the story, neither Weitz nor the studio would let me see the film. My story was based on the shooting script, as well as several earlier versions. Readers can find my review of the finished movie at www.theatlantic.com/compass.

FREE TRADE RECONSIDERED

I believe that Clive Crook needs to extend his understanding of trade economics before suggesting that "comparative advantage" alone completely justifies trade liberalization ("Beyond Belief," October *Atlantic*). David Ricardo's arguments were made nearly two centuries ago. Things have changed since then.

Crook does explain the elementary basis of comparative advantage well, adhering to Ricardo's theory that comparative advantage occurs when two countries trade in two goods. However, moving the analysis to a more intermediate level, it has been shown that when many countries are trading many goods, whether trade improves conditions in all the countries depends on a number of related variables. It is possible that some countries will not have all the appropriate values for these variables, and comparative advantage will not hold.

Crook also ignores more-advanced issues. Ricardo assumed that neither labor nor capital was mobile across borders, and that trade balances would remain in equilibrium with no protracted trade deficits. In the world today, capital is highly mobile. It crosses borders as companies invest in other countries, often to build high-tech industries in low-wage countries. Capital movements finance the U.S. trade deficit, to the detriment of our export industries. Labor is also mobile: physically, as immigration is high, and virtually, as rapid communications have enabled a great deal of outsourcing.

Ricardo assumed only finished goods were traded. But modern trade is dominated by global companies that distribute the production of intermediate goods among different countries to minimize costs and maximize profits. Sounds like they are stuck in *absolute* advantage.

In view of the significant progress made in production methods and trade

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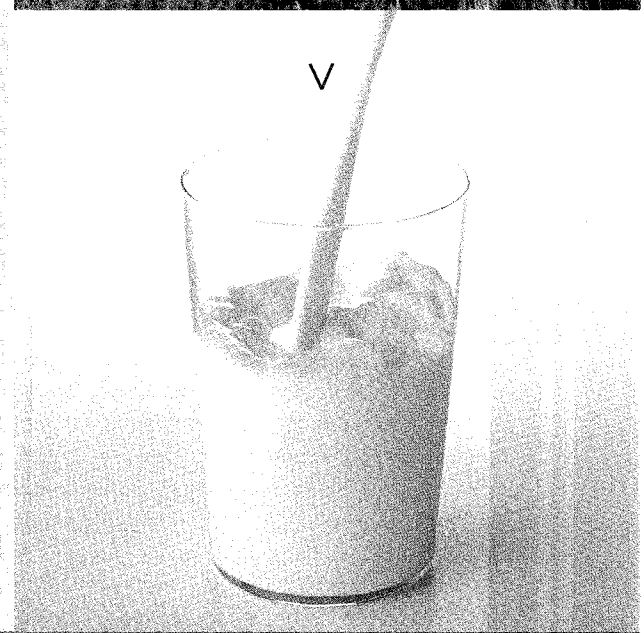

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in the past two centuries, economists are right to question whether countries always benefit from liberalization and to determine what conditions are needed to assure that such benefits accrue to the bulk of the population.

John D. Shilling
Washington, D.C.

Paul Samuelson, Alan Blinder, William Baumol, and the others Clive Crook cites are not denying the validity of comparative advantage. Using available resources in those activities at which they are most efficient continues to be the way for countries to maximize output. When all countries do this, the gains from trade are the reduced prices of all goods in the world market. However, that proposition tells us nothing about how these gains will be divided.

Samuelson's famous articles were really about the theorem of factor-price equalization. When there is free competition in a market, only one price can prevail. Globalization is creating such markets. It will promote economic efficiency and produce higher global output, but this will entail a leveling-out of factor costs of production (and incomes and standards of living) around the globe. There will be, as Samuelson says, winners, but also losers. Intuitively, one suspects that China and India will be a bit better off on average and the U.S. considerably worse off.

Warren C. Robinson
Professor of Economics Emeritus
Pennsylvania State University
Washington, D.C.

Clive Crook replies:

I agree with John Shilling that trade models recognize exceptions to the standard endorsement of liberal trade. My article said so. It drew particular attention to Jagdish Bhagwati's early finding on "immiserizing" growth. Most subsequent "bad news" theories of liberal trade—including Samuelson's recent intervention—are variants of it. Bhagwati himself argues that such instances have very limited real-world relevance. Shilling implies that successively more-sophisticated theories of trade refute the standard view. I think this is incorrect. The limited exceptions to the case for free trade have been encompassed by mainstream theory for decades, whereas the unraveling of the consensus is quite recent. To account for the unraveling, one therefore looks to new facts, not new theories. But, so far as I can see, the facts that supported the earlier consensus have not changed.

Warren Robinson predicts that global free trade will make China and India better off and the United States "considerably worse off," on the grounds that economic integration tends to equalize incomes. Incomes in America are higher than in China and India because American productivity is higher. China and India can narrow the income gap as their productivity catches up. But if America's productivity continues to rise, its incomes will continue to rise. China's growth need not be—and so far patently has not been—at the expense of the American economy as a whole. Particular groups of workers can suffer as a result of trade; nobody disputes that. But did Europe's growth after 1945 make America as a whole considerably worse off? Did Japan's? Robinson's prediction sounds plausible, but economic theory and economic history offer little or no support for it.

HILLARY'S CHOICES

Why is Caitlin Flanagan dismayed that Hillary Clinton is no longer a warm and approachable idealist ("No Girlfriend of Mine," November *Atlantic*), when no successful president in living memory has ever been? We are constantly told that candidates for the presidency need the "fire in the belly," but even more essential to success are a thick skin and a towering ego.

For president, I want someone who advocates the changes that I want to see and knows how to get them done. Considering the situation our country is likely to be in by January 2009, do we really want to send a nice person into that job?

Eugene Ingledue
Laughlintown, Pa.

Caitlin Flanagan replies:

Hillary Clinton has always had "fire in the belly," and she never was "warm and approachable." That's why she was such a dazzling figure: she took the womanly concerns of children's welfare and family poverty, and she attacked them hammer and tongs, not caring a whit whom she alienated in the process. Now she has sold out those great causes in the name of a new one: her own ambition.

Eugene Ingledue desires a president who "advocates the changes" he wants to see. If I may presume that these changes include overturning the PATRIOT Act and ending the war in Iraq, might I suggest he select a candidate who didn't vote for them?

DOING WELL AND DOING GOOD

Henry Blodget's breezy overview of socially responsible investing ("The Conscientious Investor," October *Atlantic*) would have us believe that long-term supply and demand applies to products and services, but not to the stocks of companies that provide them. If only 9 percent of fund dollars are now invested according to socially responsible principles, there should be room to keep boosting demand for clean stocks and raising their share prices for decades to come.

When I invest in clean-tech companies, it's not to make a fast buck. I invest in solar, wind, plug-in hybrid, and organic-produce companies because I like what they're doing and want them to succeed in the marketplace. I am creating demand for what they do, and so are millions of other Americans.

By the same token, there's no compelling reason to buy stock in a company whose product, when used as directed, kills its customers and investors. Such a company *has* to pay fantastically high dividends to continue attracting investors, because its business model is morally repugnant and self-defeating over the long term.

Blodget thinks present interest in sustainability gives a near-term "bump" to certain stocks, necessarily limiting their future returns. But the overarching need to stabilize the global climate

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will be with us long after this fad and the next are gone. Why not invest now in the start-ups that will be delivering profitable solutions long after tobacco, coal, and oil have breathed their last gasp?

Chris Calwell
Vice President, Policy and Research
Ecos Consulting
Durango, Colo.

Henry Blodget inaccurately states that the movement to divest from Sudan targets "any company doing business with Sudan." The movement is actually narrowly focused, targeting only about two dozen problem companies aiding the regime in Khartoum. Most of the divestment pressure targets Sudan's oil industry; oil revenue provides arms and funding for the genocide, rather than development for the Sudanese people.

Eric Cohen
Investors Against Genocide
Lexington, Mass.

Someone at *The Atlantic* has a marvelous sense of humor. Who but a humorist could imagine, let alone publish, an article on socially responsible investing by Henry Blodget, a former Merrill Lynch research analyst barred for life from the securities industry? What should we readers of *The Atlantic* expect in the future? "How to Raise a Puppy Humanely," by Michael Vick?

Vince Reardon
San Diego, Calif.

Henry Blodget replies:
It is true that The Atlantic*'s editors have a great sense of humor and irony. It is also true, as Eric Cohen states, that Sudan divestment organizations do not advocate divesting in "any" company doing business with Sudan—just a subset of them.*

On Chris Calwell's assertions, two points. First, a lot more than 9 percent of fund dollars are invested in stocks that socially responsible investors approve of; the 9 percent figure just refers to those stocks picked specifically for their social merits rather than their investment potential. So it's wrong to think that 91 percent of fund dollars are going to pour into SRI stocks once other investors get a clue. Second, you don't have to be George Soros to see that there are fantastic investment opportunities in solar power, wind power, biofuels, etc. The trouble is that the rest of the world doesn't have to be George Soros, either. All that demand drives the valuations of those investments up—and reduces their future returns. Meanwhile, cigarette companies trade at fire-sale prices because everyone thinks they're going to be sued out of existence, but people keep buying cigarettes. So cigarette-company investors earn extraordinary returns (and, one hopes, spend them on solar panels).

The best reason to be a socially responsible investor is the one Chris Calwell alludes to: you get to feel good knowing that your investment dollars are helping make the world a better place.

ADVICE AND CONSENT

In his piece "The Great Assimilator" (November *Atlantic*), Christopher Hitchens states that Henderson of *Henderson the Rain King* is Saul Bellow's only non-Jewish central character. Well, not quite so. Albert Corde, the protagonist of *The Dean's December*, is also a Gentile.

Peter G. Parker
Houston, Texas

Editors' Note:
Paul Elie's article, "A Man for All Reasons" (November Atlantic*), incorrectly stated the date of Wilfred McClay's talk to the Family Research Council. Dr. McClay delivered the lecture in November 2001, not March 2002. The author of a letter in the December* Atlantic *was incorrectly identified as Sam Bass Warren; he is Sam Bass Warner. We regret the errors.*

The American Idea

OUR READERS' VIEW

For *The Atlantic*'s 150th-anniversary issue in November, we asked a variety of writers, artists, and public figures to define their concept of the American idea—and we invited our readers to do the same. We've since received more than 400 submissions, from readers in 40 states and eight countries. The writers were a fittingly diverse group, including recent immigrants and native-born citizens, American students studying overseas, and American soldiers serving in Iraq. But in defining the American idea, they returned again and again to similar themes—self-reliance and self-improvement, "hope in the face of change" and "a wild optimism in the face of an adverse reality," the freedom to govern ourselves and freedom from government, period.

"The organizing principle or Idea of America is that there isn't one," Jude Blanchette wrote from Charlotte, Vermont, expressing a common sentiment—that America is a place where everyone is allowed his or her own idea, and the liberty necessary to pursue it. Nandini Pandya, a South Asian immigrant who now lives in Milford, Connecticut, contrasted her ancestral culture's promotion of "platitudes like fate or karma and apathy" and its dismissal of "individual agency" against America's "exhilarating" dedication to the pursuit of happiness, wherever it may lead. For Anand Prakash, of Arlington, Virginia, the American idea is a secularized version of Christianity: "an offer of absolution to every person," promising "salvation in this life," rather than in the next. For Matthew Ryan Kelley—self-described as "a proud, flag-burning American sleeping under the stars in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains"—it's a dream of anarchy, in which we are asked to "believe in ourselves, needing no outside law and trusting none."

Many writers argued that the American idea is in grave danger—not only from the Bush administration, a frequent target of criticism, but from its own internal contradictions. Writing from Paso Robles, California, Sean Boling contended that our exceptionalism has bred arrogance and complacency. "We need to peel The American Idea off the back windows of our automobiles and put it back to work," he wrote. Mark Yessian of

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Boston was concerned that our "instinctive bias toward freedom ... impedes our capacity to address urgent societal problems," while Alexandra Pitzing of Leipzig, Germany, worried that the American idea of "work as one of the highest values in life" has curdled into an acceptance of a minimum-wage economy, where the "struggle to survive" trumps any notions of "freedom and dignity" in labor.

But there was optimism as well. "The true essence of the American Idea is hope for the future," Katie Gilley wrote from Baton Rouge. "Despite its many flaws and failings, its strange psychoses, its unusual way of hiding its virtues until they are most needed," Will Munsil wrote from Lakewood, Colorado, "America is unique on Earth ... the American Idea is not perfect, but it is still necessary." Steve Norris of Denver listed a host of challenges facing the American idea, but then expressed confidence in our ability to meet them: "Our history may be short," he concluded, "but our track record is reassuring."

What follow are edited excerpts of some of our readers' essays:

Not long ago, when the curators at Ford's Theatre in Washington looked anew at the plain black coat President Lincoln was wearing the night he was assassinated, they found embroidered in the lining the words *One Country, One Destiny*. That is the American idea—a noble ideal, unfinished, incomplete, never to be achieved once and for all, tested again and again by great tragedy. The *unum* derived from our *pluribus* remains our elusive national theme. We are many still trying to be one, trying to be "we."

Missy Daniel
Washington, D.C.

The American idea is the noun itself: *ideas*. A free democracy incubates, facilitates, promotes, and fights over ideas. For every idea, there is a counter-idea, a modified idea, a ridiculous idea. The stress and strain of competing ideas bears down on us, sometimes fueling violent confrontation, but mostly providing ammunition for action and an improved society. Keep them coming, change them, laugh at them, and cry over them. Debate them in the halls of Congress and the legislative byways of local government. Let them collide in a courtroom. Ideas are the cacophony of democracy.

Michael H. Miller
Los Angeles, Calif.

Most nations are homogeneous—their citizens bound together by similarities in appearance and philosophy, like colonies of termites or shoals of sardines. America is different. Her citizens do not all look alike, think alike, worship the same God, or share identical goals and dreams. They clump together, though, because of one pinprick point of convergence, tiny but profound. This American idea, this national glue, is the great truth understood by our Founding Fathers—that individuals form nations, not the reverse. Since this nation's inception, individuality has been nurtured, celebrated, and elevated above conformity. As a result, the American idea continues to attract the strong and talented, continues to guarantee their freedom to choose happiness, and continues to make the United States shine brightest in the firmament of nations.

Thomas M. Hill
Hartland, Wis.

America is the place—still, after all these years—where you are limited only by your imagination. The streets are not paved with gold, of course, and the men (and women) who govern us are not angels, but that's because America is not utopia and was never meant to be. Instead, for this immigrant, as for all who came before me, it's the best country for realizing one's ambitions. If you are content to be mediocre, America may not be the best place for you (though you'll do fine), but if you are a striver, the United States offers the chance to make the most of whatever talents you have. That is the American idea.

Ilya Shapiro
Washington, D.C.

There are many ideas that we could call "American," but the bedrock beneath them all is the belief that a nation built wholly on the ideas of liberty, justice, and equality can endure and prosper. This is as revolutionary a claim now as it was when our forebears first made it. Some assert a more concrete basis for our nation: we are Americans because we share a tongue, or a Bible, or a land, and these foundations are in peril. But the first of us chose the ideas they did because they knew what only the last of us will forget: that race, religion, culture, and the rest are all, ultimately, also ideas—and ours are stronger and truer material for the forging of nations.

Miles Townes
Arlington, Va.

Four hundred years ago, the founders of our American civilization discovered a physical world that was unimaginably vast: endless forests, abundant clean water, wild game enough to live on—a wilderness of plenty waiting to be subdued. Later, coal, iron ore, gold and copper, and then oil poured forth from the Earth. No wonder then, as European settlers spread across the continent, that the pursuit of wealth became the ideal. Come to America. Strike it rich! Make your fortune! Enjoy the good life!

Now we have found that our resources are not inexhaustible. The world is warming, and rivers dry up before they reach the sea. Population grows, and we consume our children's future. Slowly, we are realizing that we can't all be rich. Can we now learn to live in harmony with the Earth? Can we cut back, husband our resources, and share more equally? Is a new American idea possible in the age of limits?

Greg Studen
Novelty, Ohio

To read the full versions of the essays mentioned here, along with others selected by The Atlantic*'s editors, visit www.theatlantic.com/essays. Authors of the entries chosen will receive free copies of our anthology* The American Idea: The Best of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

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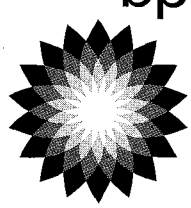

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THE AGENDA

AP PHOTO/DUSAN VRANIC

COMMENT

Our inevitable withdrawal from Iraq could poison American politics for a generation.

Partisan Retreat

BY JONATHAN RAUCH

A few months ago, in a packed, stuffy room atop a hotel in downtown Washington, a prominent speaker made a startling remark. Even more startling, no one in the audience seemed startled.

The audience was a predominantly conservative crowd assembled by the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a right-of-center think tank. The speaker was Bernard Lewis, a doyen of Western Islamic studies and a man widely admired on the right for his prescient warnings about radical Islam. (Among his writings is a 1990 article for this magazine, "The Roots of Muslim Rage.") Having spoken on "The Challenge of Islam," he was asked how things were going in Iraq. He replied that conditions had improved there and would continue to improve. "Unless," he added, "we are betrayed from within."

No one showed surprise or discomfort. The session flowed on. But wait. *Unless we are betrayed from within?* Unpack that phrase, and then unpack the bland reaction to it, and you have a glimpse of one of the ugliest potential outcomes of an already plenty ugly war: a long-term, low-level, persistent civil conflict—not in Iraq, but in America.

In the annals of modern polling, the Iraq War has been unique in the degree to which it has split America along party lines. "There's nothing even close," says Gary Jacobson, a political scientist at the University of California at San Diego.

We think of the Vietnam War as controversial, but it was much more controversial within the two parties than between them. The partisan gap in support for the war rarely exceeded 10 percentage points, and averaged closer to 5. The Korean conflict in the 1950s, the military action in Kosovo in the 1990s, and the use of force in Afghanistan were barely more controversial, with the parties usually only 10 to 15 points apart. Even the Gulf War, for all the Democrats' misgivings, saw partisan disagreement averaging only about 20 percentage points.

The Iraq War has been something else again. It got off on a partisan footing, with support from virtually all of the Republicans in Congress but only a minority of the Democrats. Then it turned even more partisan. By mid-2004,

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the difference between Republican and Democratic public support for the war had reached about *60* percentage points. Indeed, many of the partisans were living in separate realities. In 2006 polling, only about a fifth of Democrats recalled ever having supported the war, though in fact, almost half had supported it before the invasion. Meanwhile, almost a third of Republicans thought weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq, and another third said the weapons existed but hadn't been found.

As painful and polarizing as party-line warfare has been, however, a party-line retreat would be worse. Many Republicans believe victory (however defined) is a matter of American resolve. Quite a few think that President Bush's new strategy is working but that Democrats won't admit it. They think Democrats are *intentionally* undermining the war effort, in order to improve their own political prospects by giving President Bush and the Republicans—oh, and the country—a black eye.

So begins the narrative of betrayal: the "stab in the back" narrative, as its historical precedents (most famously in interwar Germany) have been called. "We never really lost," goes this narrative. "We defeated ourselves." Or, in the really toxic version: "Some of us defeated the rest." This kind of narrative, if it develops a popular following, can poison politics for a generation.

We can assume that if the Iraq War ends badly, some Republican hard-liners, amplified by conservative talk radio, will accuse the Democrats of perfidy. The question is: Will the betrayal narrative find traction with the broader American public? In particular, will mainstream Republicans buy into it? Or will cooler heads prevail, so the country can heal and move on?

The answer, of course, is that it depends. By 2009, Republicans might be just as fed up with Iraq as Democrats are, in which case a rapid exit would be as uncontroversial as the Korean conflict's abrupt and unsatisfying conclusion was. Or the engagement might turn into a shining success and end on its own. Or Republicans might win the White House while Democrats hold Congress, ensuring that both parties share credit and blame for the denouement. (The fact that Republican presidents and a Democratic Congress took the United States out of Vietnam did much to draw the sting from that defeat. It still stung, of course.)

If Democrats win both branches, their biggest challenge will not be leaving Iraq; it will be keeping America in one piece on the way out.

At this writing, however, none of those scenarios looks as likely as the Democrats' winning both the White House and Congress, with the parties still divided on the war. Then the Democrats will have a decision to make: Withdraw as quickly as possible, on party-line congressional votes? Or withdraw more slowly, at a pace that can command sizable support among Republicans—say, a majority or near-majority of them?

In 2009, a Democratic president might say something like this: "Every year of this administration, America will reduce its troop strength in Iraq. The downward path is nonnegotiable and ironclad. But the pace is not. *If* Iraqis try sincerely and strenuously to keep their country together, or *if* they decentralize enough to keep the peace, and *if* they produce results, we will help them, including militarily. If not, we'll pull out much faster." This is not unlike what Joe Biden has said, both as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as a Democratic presidential candidate. It implies a faster withdrawal than Bush Republicans prefer, but a slower one than dovish Democrats demand. And my guess is that many, if not most, Republicans would go for it.

Republican hard-liners, of course, might prefer demagoguery. But grown-up Republicans would recognize that withdrawal is inevitable; they would want to be relevant; they would feel battered by the election results, and tired of incurring the public's wrath; they would face intense pressure not to sabotage a new commander in chief who could claim the public mandate.

The bigger problem for a middle way out, I would guess, would be on the Democratic left. So far in the primary campaign, Democratic presidential candidates have had a hard time keeping the door open for *any* American forces to stay in Iraq. If the Democrats sweep the board this year, doves will say that the public has spoken and wants change. Why in the world should they pace the withdrawal from Iraq at a rate that suits the *losing* party?

Yet if the Democrats were to rush for the exit with Republicans unified against them, they would be blamed by Republicans for whatever subsequent disasters befell Iraq and, for that matter, the whole disaster-prone Middle East. For years, they would face charges of having "cut and run," which could reinvigorate the debilitating stereotype of Democratic weakness. On the other hand, a policy with significant two-party support would be less contentious, more sustainable, and thus more likely to succeed. Running the whole government, Democrats would need to care about succeeding.

The crucial decision the next president will make is not whether to withdraw forces from Iraq—that is baked in the cake—but how. As a corollary, if Democrats win both branches in the fall, their biggest challenge will not be leaving Iraq; it will be keeping America in one piece on the way out. Having felt flicked aside by the Republicans through Bush's presidency, victorious Democrats will be tempted to return the favor. Before succumbing, they might recall how badly partisan warfare has gone. Then they might ask themselves why a partisan retreat would go any better.

Jonathan Rauch is an *Atlantic* correspondent.

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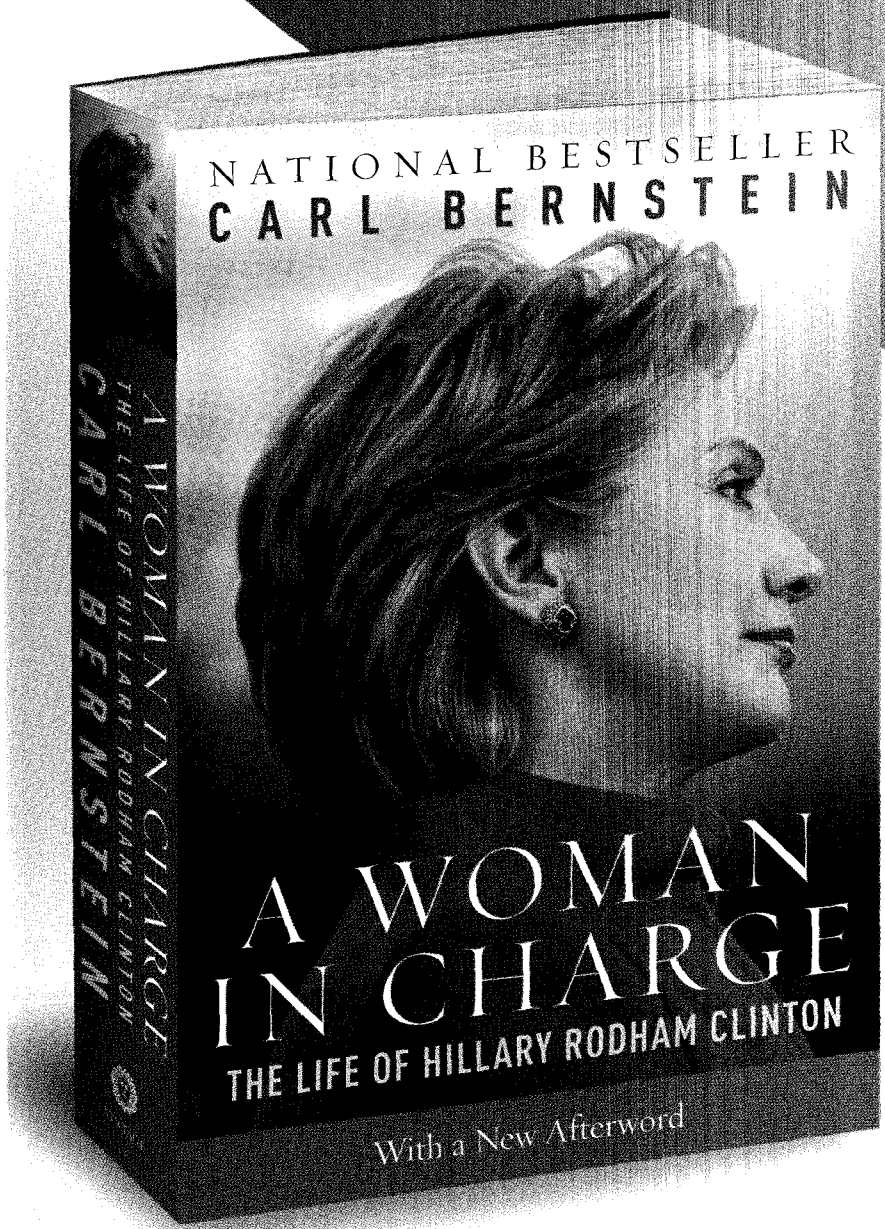

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Calendar

What to watch for in the weeks ahead

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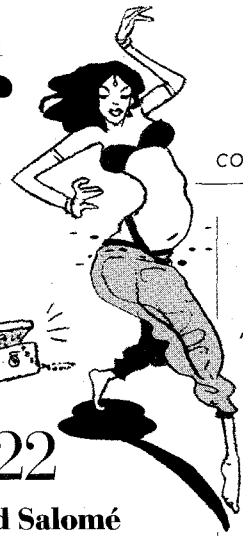
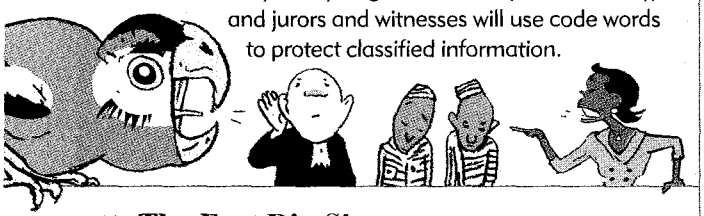


JAN **14** **Mum's the Word**

Two former pro-Israel lobbyists stand trial today, charged with passing classified intelligence about U.S. policy toward Iran from a Pentagon source to journalists and Israeli officials. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other national-security heavyweights will be required to testify, and jurors and witnesses will use code words to protect classified information.



JAN **15** **The Fort Dix Six**

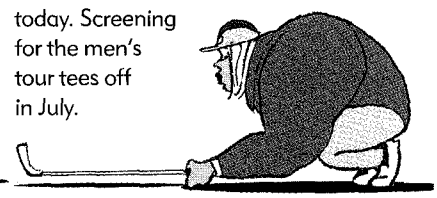
Five alleged radical Islamists go on trial today in Camden, N.J., accused of training, scouting, and gathering weapons for a planned attack last year on nearby Fort Dix. A sixth group member, who supplied arms, has pleaded guilty and will be sentenced in February.

JAN **15-22** **Grand Salomé**

Flesh jiggles, veils drape, and hips shake on the Sinai this week, at the Alf Leila We Leila Festival—also known as the Belly Dancing World Cup—in Taba, Egypt. The winner takes home a gold belly-dancing trophy and $12,000.

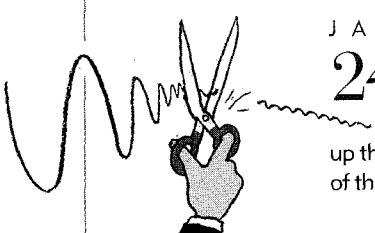
JAN **18** **Pumping Irons**

When you hear "steroids," you probably don't think "ladies' golf." But doping scandals in other sports have prompted pro golf to fortify its honor code with drug tests—for both performance-enhancing and recreational drugs—starting with the beginning of the LPGA season today. Screening for the men's tour tees off in July.



JAN **22** **Multiple Choice**

Coming in the heat of the presidential primaries, today's 35th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* should make abortion an even more prominent topic, especially given the proven adaptability of several Republican front-runners on the subject.

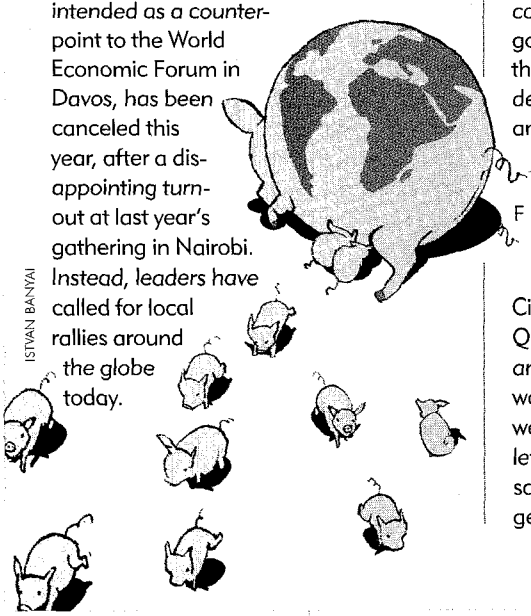


JAN **24** **Going ... Going ... Mobile!**

Today the FCC auctions off a rare and valuable chunk of radio spectrum expected to fetch as much as $15 billion. Under new rules—lobbied for by Google to open up the cell-phone market—the winning bidder must open part of the spectrum to any mobile device that can use it.

JAN **26** **Localization**

The World Social Forum, the annual anti-globalization klatch intended as a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum in Davos, has been canceled this year, after a disappointing turnout at last year's gathering in Nairobi. Instead, leaders have called for local rallies around the globe today.



ISTVAN BANYAI

FEB **3** **Amateur Minute**

The talent-show craze taking over television reaches the acme of American culture: the Super Bowl commercial. Doritos invited garage bands to submit their acts. The winner will debut today during the annual marketing blowout.

FEB **4** **New York's Trials**

Three New York City detectives stand trial in Queens for killing Sean Bell, an unarmed black man who was shot 50 times on his wedding day in 2006 as he left a bachelor party. Police say they thought he was getting a gun from his car.

ALSO IN FEBRUARY

Apple Cedes

After Apple introduced the iPhone last year, ambitious hackers competed to put third-party apps on the hot new gadget—only to be thwarted by an update from Apple. This month, Apple releases a software-development kit for the iPhone and iPod Touch, meaning the—authorized!—fun can begin anew.

Returns and Exchanges

Ecuador introduces a new strategy to combat the Latin American diaspora. "Plan Retorno" aims to lure natives living abroad with loans for new homes and businesses, improved education and health programs, and exceptions to the usual duties when they bring back cars, cash, and goods. Starting this month, Ecuadoreans in the U.S. are eligible.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

THE MILITARY

A Few Good Ad Men

"The country that owns Madison Avenue ought to win this one easily," a Marine colonel remarked during the first year of the war in Iraq. He was wrong, but he was thinking along the right lines, according to a recent Rand study, whose authors argue that the United States military could learn a lot from the advertising world. They suggest that the military could create more support for its operations, and thereby achieve greater success in conflicts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, if it updated its "brand" identity using models such as Apple, Lexus, and Starbucks. For instance, just as the marketing world uses "segmentation" to identify different groups of customers and focus on the most profitable ones, the military could use "enemy prisoner-of-war interrogations, focus groups, and surveys" to identify potential partners within local populations. The study also suggests that the military do more to meet and manage "customer" expectations,

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taking a page from Continental Airlines, which tells passengers as much as possible about flight delays instead of keeping them in the dark or repeatedly promising that the flight will depart "in 15 minutes." When the U.S. military invaded, Iraqis had outsize expectations of the American brand, expecting more electricity and better infrastructure immediately. "Like the desk representative at Continental Airlines," the study counsels, the military "should explain the situation and emphasize that all necessary efforts are being undertaken to address the problem," but it should never promise something it can't deliver or set a specific date for achieving a goal unless that deadline can be met. The report also makes a case for re-branding the military, advertising it more as an organization that's "doing good" in the world, through relief efforts like those in post-tsunami Southeast Asia or in post-earthquake Pakistan.

—"Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation," Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, Russell W. Glenn, Rand Corporation

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Courting Madness

Since the insanity defense was first copped in a British court in 1843, canny malefactors have used it to tip the scales of justice in their favor—or so the popular imagination would have it. But studies show that the public vastly overestimates both how frequently insanity pleas are used and how successful they are, misconceptions that can have major legal consequences. A recent paper by two researchers at the University of California at Irvine surveyed 113 people who'd been excused from jury duty at a courthouse in Nevada, asking their opinions about mental illness and its relevance in legal cases. The subjects were then given four vignettes describing cases in which an insanity plea could conceivably be used and were asked to render a judgment. The authors found that "jurors with negative attitudes towards the insanity defense are less likely than jurors with more positive attitudes to find any defendant insane." An obvious point, perhaps, but as the authors note, a negative attitude can create a serious impediment to a fair trial. Jurors who oppose the death penalty are excused from serving in capital-punishment cases; the authors recommend a similar system for rooting out jurors who are biased against the insanity defense.

ONE GUY who needed the insanity defense

—"Constructing Insanity: Jurors' Prototypes, Attitudes, and Legal Decision-Making," Jennifer Eno Louden and Jennifer L. Skeem, Behavioral Science and the Law

PUBLIC HEALTH

The Grin Dividend

Our gap-toothed English cousins may wonder why we Americans fret as much as we do about our teeth, but two public-health researchers have part of the answer: The way our smile looks affects our earnings. They analyzed the effect of childhood exposure to fluoride—which strengthens tooth enamel and can reduce tooth decay by up to 50 percent—on adult income, and found that adults who were raised in communities with fluoridated water make about 4 percent more than those who weren't. This effect was concentrated among people of low socioeconomic background, and it was more pronounced for women, who, the authors suggest, may be more likely than men to choose careers that place a premium on physical appearance and are more likely to be discriminated against based on their looks.

—"The Economic Value of Teeth," Sherry Glied and Matthew Neidell, Columbia University and NBER

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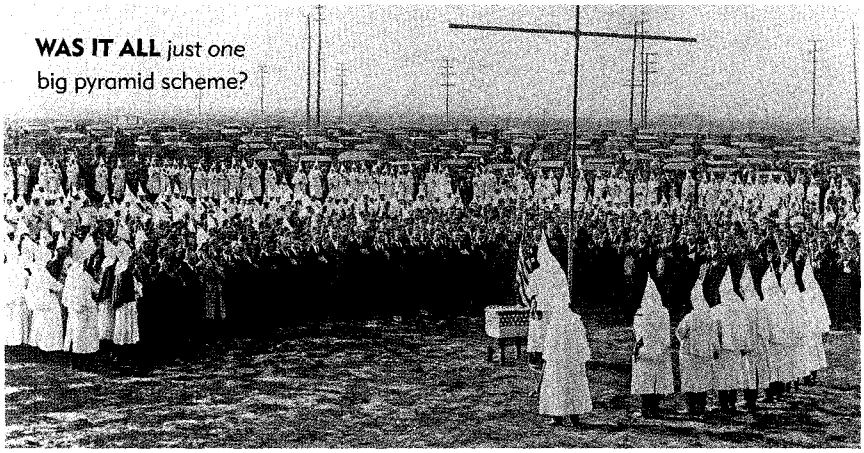
ROMANCE

Easy Go

Four psychologists have issued a rebuttal to Neil Sedaka: breaking up isn't all that hard to do. The researchers tracked 69 first-year students at Northwestern University who'd been in a romantic relationship for at least two months at the onset of the study, regularly asking them how they would feel if they and their partners broke up. Within six months, 38 percent of the subjects had parted ways, but overall, the students tended to experience much less heartache and distress about the split than they'd predicted two weeks before it happened. The students who most overestimated how anguished they would feel tended to be those who'd reported being the most in love, those who'd been dumped, and those who'd anticipated having trouble finding a new love. Those who predicted their feelings most accurately, the authors hypothesize, were the students who were already looking forward to the single life and the pleasures of being back on the prowl.

—*"Mispredicting Distress Following Romantic Break Up: Revealing the Time Course of the Affective Forecasting Error," Paul W. Eastwick, Eli J. Finkel et al.,* Journal of Experimental Social Psychology



WAS IT ALL *just one* big pyramid scheme?

AP PHOTO

HISTORY

Birth of a Corporation

During its heyday, in the mid-1920s, was the Ku Klux Klan more like a marketing firm than a terrorist organization? A new paper co-authored by Steven Levitt, the University of Chicago economist who scrutinized the Klan in the best-selling *Freakonomics*, argues that the group was far more successful at raising money than at achieving its professed goals of passing racist legislation and intimidating black or foreign-born Americans. The authors, who compiled data on more than 60,000 Klansmen from several states, found that even at the height of its power—in the mid-1920s, membership may have been as high as 4 million—the Klan was politically ineffective. There's "little evidence" that its activity prompted African Americans to leave their communities, and though significant numbers of Klan-backed politicians were elected to local and national office, they don't seem to have pushed through very much legislation. But the Klan did have an "uncanny ability to raise revenue." New-member initiation cost $10 and annual dues $5, and members were required to buy an official Klan robe and encouraged to purchase other Klan paraphernalia, such as swords or helmets. Klan members typically spent about $275 (in today's dollars) in their first year and about $80 in subsequent years. Recruiters received a 40 percent commission for bringing in new members. Using similar incentives up the chain of command, the Klan operated on a "multi-level marketing principle, much like modern companies such as Amway and Avon" do. The higher-ups reaped huge profits: the authors calculate that D. C. Stephenson, the "grand dragon" of Indiana, took in more than $2 million annually from state operations.

—*"Hatred and Profits: Getting Under the Hood of the Ku Klux Klan," Roland G. Fryer Jr. and Steven D. Levitt, NBER*

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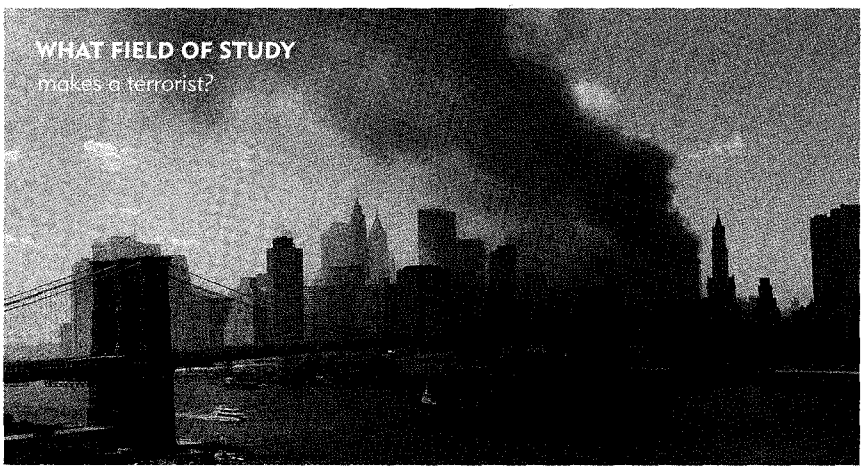
ECONOMICS

Pound Foolish

If you want to save money, don't count the pennies: they may be just a ruse to distract you from the higher number on the other side of the decimal point. A recent paper suggests that because we tend to use precise numbers for small amounts and round numbers (lots of zeros) for large ones, sellers can make buyers perceive a price as smaller than it is by replacing zeros with other digits. The authors showed their subjects a listing for a house along with various prices, and asked whether those prices seemed high or low. Precise prices like $391,534 were seen as cheaper than round ones like $390,000, even though the round prices were actually lower. The authors then examined more than 27,000 real-estate transactions on Long Island and in South Florida and discovered the same effect at work in real-life deals. In South Florida, having at least one zero at the end of the list price lowered the final sale price by about 0.72 percent compared with houses listed at a similar price, three zeros lowered it by 0.73 percent, and each additional zero lowered it another 0.39 percent. (The effect was slightly less pronounced on Long Island.) While seemingly small, this effect can add up to thousands of dollars.

—*"Do Consumers Perceive Precise Prices to Be Lower Than Round Prices? Evidence From Laboratory and Market Data," Manoj Thomas, Daniel H. Simon, and Vrinda Kadiyali, Cornell University Johnson School Research Paper Series*



TERRORISM

Engineers for Osama

Now that the stereotype of the poverty-stricken terrorist has been dispelled by studies showing that militancy and high levels of education go hand in hand, a new Oxford study tries to explain why so many violent Islamic radicals are ... engineers. The authors gathered data on 404 militants from 31 countries, and among the 178 whose principal academic focus could be determined, engineering was by far the most popular subject. Seventy-eight had pursued an engineering degree, compared with 34 in Islamic studies, 14 in medicine, and 12 in economics or business studies. The authors couldn't find evidence to support the idea that radical groups seek out engineers for their skills. Instead, they speculate that something in the engineer's mind-set—the emphasis on structure and rules, and on finding singular solutions to complicated problems—may fit neatly with Islamist notions of the ideal society. (In support of this hypothesis, the authors cite surveys from America, the Middle East, and Canada indicating that engineers are more likely than other professionals to be religious and right-wing.) They also note that engineers tend to be high-achievers who rise by merit, which may make them more likely to be frustrated by their interactions with corrupt bureaucracies in the Middle East and North Africa and thus receptive to radical messages.

—*"Engineers of Jihad," Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, Oxford University Department of Sociology Working Papers*

SOCIETY

Innocent Bystanders

"For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks ... Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead." That's how *The New York Times* described the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese, which has become a standard parable in psychology textbooks. But according to three professors from Lancaster University and the University of West England, the famous story isn't an accurate account of the incident. Citing court transcripts, legal documents, and recent historical research debunking the *Times* account, they report that many of the famous details don't withstand scrutiny. Among other errors, there were only two attacks, not three; the configuration of the crime scene would have made it impossible for all but one of the known witnesses to have seen the crime in its entirety; the police may have been called much earlier than thought; and Genovese was alive when the cops finally arrived. The professors also examined accounts of the murder in 10 popular undergraduate psychology textbooks and found that a version largely derived from the *Times* story is routinely repeated as an example of the "bystander effect," or the failure of people in groups to help others in distress. The authors believe much of the research on this effect is sound, but they suggest that the widespread use of the Genovese story in textbooks has predisposed a generation of researchers to concentrate on the negative ways that groups can affect behavior.

—*"The Kitty Genovese Murder and the Social Psychology of Helping: The Parable of the 38 Witnesses," Rachel Manning, Mark Levine, and Alan Collins,* American Psychologist

For links to the documents discussed in this section, visit www.theatlantic.com/doc/200801/primarysources.

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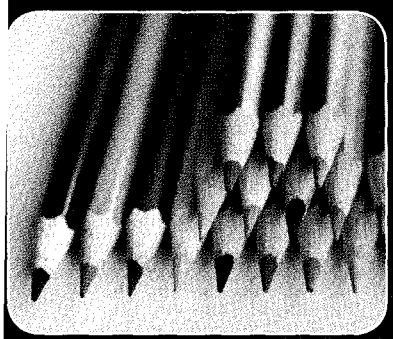

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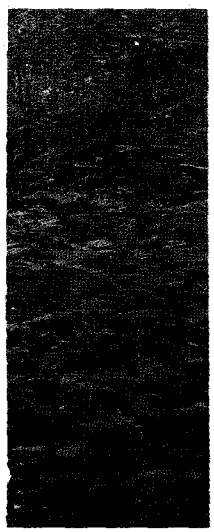

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POLL

ONE KOREA?

The Atlantic recently asked a group of foreign-policy authorities about the future of North and South Korea.

Q: What is the likelihood that North and South Korea will continue to reconcile and normalize relations over the next five years?

54% SOMEWHAT LIKELY

"The leadership of North Korea seems to [now believe that] it is in its interest to risk destabilizing pressures from opening up to South Korea in order to gain the economic benefits that 'normalization' provides. South Korea seems to believe that [normalizing relations would] lessen the chances of a cataclysmic collapse of the regime in the North. As long as both sides accept this cost/benefit exchange, some form of normalization will continue—barring a sudden internally driven political upheaval in the North."

"There is now a consensus in South Korea that closer economic and political relations is in its interest. While the conservatives and progressives might dispute how quickly to move, the direction is now beyond question."

"It depends mostly on whether we keep to the [nuclear] deal and are prepared to live with difficulties and ambiguities. We've got to buy time for this non-war track to work."

41% HIGHLY LIKELY

"Reconciliation and normalization will not occur overnight, but three conditions make the peninsula ripe for a gradual improvement in relations over the next five years: the nuclear deal and better relations with the U.S.; the increase in economic linkages with South Korea; and the more determined engagement of China."

"I see no evidence in South Korea of serious controversy over the goal of reconciliation. The momentum is likely to come from the South."

5% UNLIKELY

Q: What is the likelihood of unification over the next 10 years?

50% UNLIKELY

"The main hurdle to unification, beyond North Korea's refusal to give up their [nuclear] system, is the South Korean fear of what unification would mean for the living standards of South Koreans."

"It is impossible to predict when reunification might occur. Some form of confederation could be the outcome of continued engagement over the next few years, but a real reunification will only occur when the current regime in the North is gone."

"The chances of unification, even in 10 years, are very slight. Look for reconciliation, peaceful coexistence, and at most, some type of confederation."

41% SOMEWHAT LIKELY

"This will require some fundamental decisions on the part of Kim Jong Il that so far he's been unwilling to make. South Korean officials will also have to decide that the tremendous cost of reunification is worth the increased security. Some in the region will see reunification as a threat."

"The North Korean regime finds open trade to be highly threatening and is unlikely to engage deeply with an advanced economy such as South Korea's."

9% HIGHLY LIKELY

"The North's political and economic condition is unsustainable; collapse followed by rapid integration with the South is virtually inevitable."

PARTICIPANTS (39): *Ken Adelman, Graham Allison, Ronald Asmus, Samuel Berger, Daniel Blumenthal, Stephen Bosworth, Daniel Byman, Warren Christopher, Wesley Clark, Richard Clarke, Ivo Daalder, James Dobbins, Lawrence Eagleburger, Jay Garner, Leslie Gelb, Marc Grossman, John Hamre, Gary Hart, Bruce Hoffman, John Hulsman, Robert Hunter, David Kay, Andrew Krepinevich, Charles Kupchan, John Lehman, Edward Luttwak, John McLaughlin, Richard Myers, William Nash, Joseph Nye, Kenneth Pollack, Thomas Pickering, Paul Pillar, Joseph Ralston, Wendy Sherman, James Steinberg, Shibley Telhami, Jon Wolfsthal, Anthony Zinni.*

Not all participants answered all questions.

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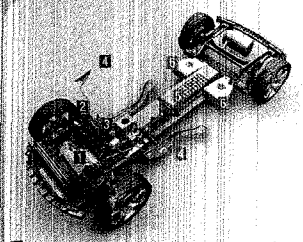

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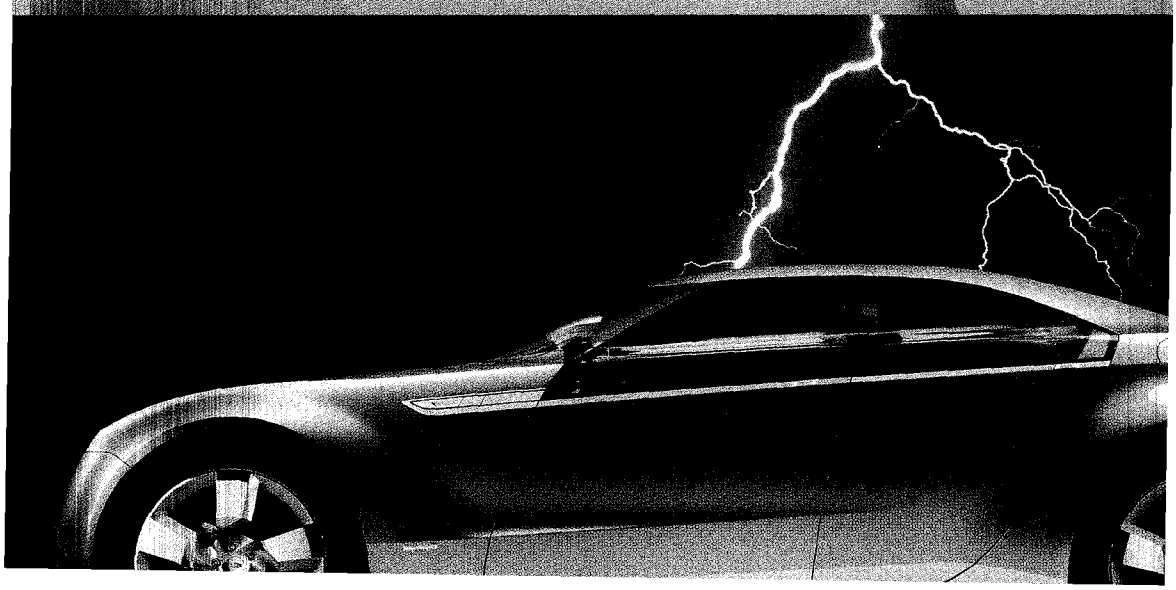

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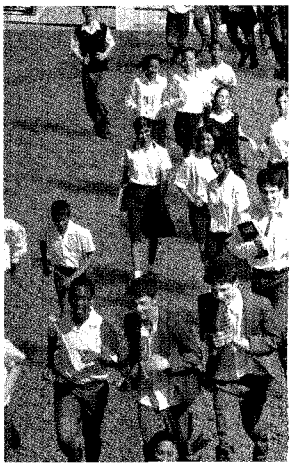

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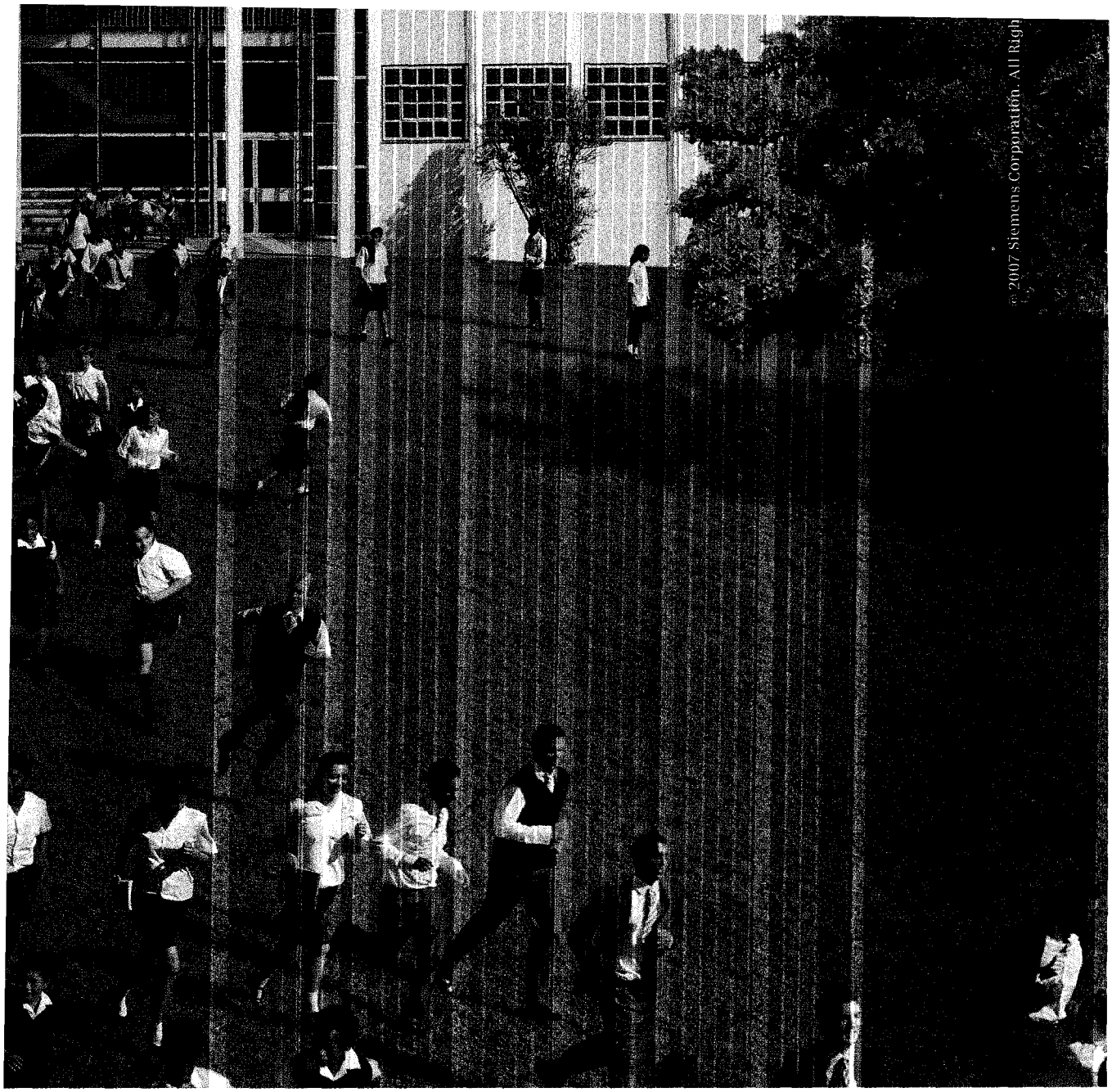

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THE NATION IN NUMBERS

In exurbs and fringe cities, the mortgage crisis is having a domino effect.

There Goes the Neighborhood

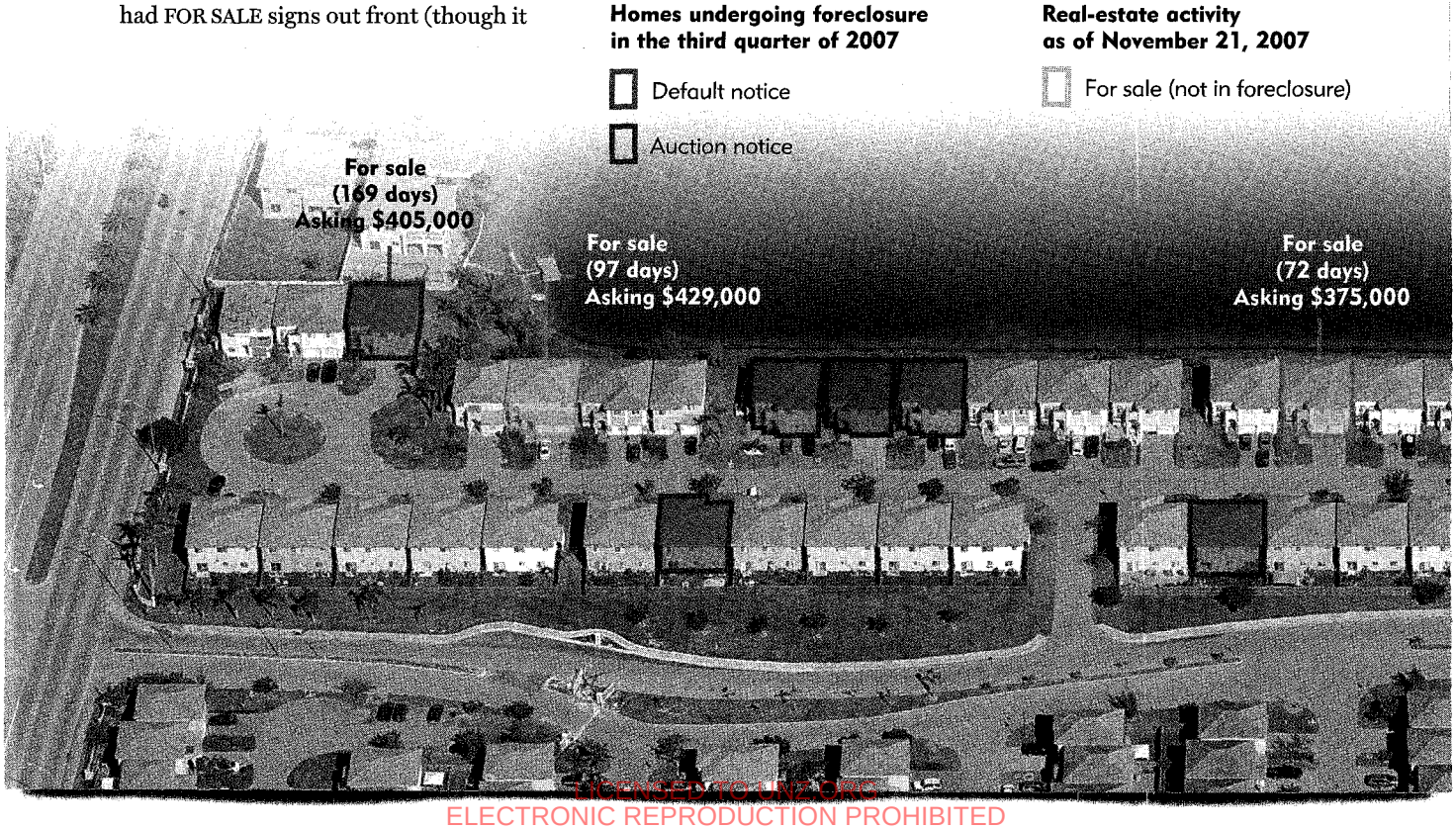
BY MATTHEW YGLESIAS

In Three Lakes, Florida, an unincorporated area of Miami-Dade County lying on the western fringe of the city's sprawl, sits a two-block cul-de-sac of generously sized houses with identical Spanish-tile roofs, packed so tightly that their eaves almost touch. The houses on the north side of the street border one of the many man-made lakes that dot the area, by-products of the efforts to drain swampland for development. To the west, roads run through a patch of empty land adorned only by billboards for three new communities planned by Monaco Developers, which would like to sell you a house.

It's a pretty typical piece of aspirational America: two cars (or more) in every driveway. The driveways, that is, that aren't empty. On a rainy day in November, two houses on the cul-de-sac had FOR SALE signs out front (though it turns out more were in fact for sale). In front of another, a pile of furniture sat soaking in the downpour. According to data provided by RealtyTrac, a business that tracks foreclosures for real-estate professionals and investors, 10 of the 45 homes on the street received foreclosure filings in the third quarter of 2007 alone. (Such filings range from notices that a loan is in substantial default to notices of auction or repossession by the lender.) Three of the 10 had just been purchased—two in February, one in July. On average, the 10 homes had been owned for just 22 months before foreclosure.

As the collapse of the subprime mortgage market roils the economy, it is in places like Three Lakes—the fast-growth fringes of America's metro areas—where much of the trouble is originating. Most of Miami-Dade County's 29,923 foreclosures in the first three quarters of 2007 occurred on its outer fringes. In Clark County, Nevada, where nearly one in 20 homes is in foreclosure, the worst damage has likewise been done in a ring around central Las Vegas.

Nationally, the variety of communities facing a wave of foreclosures is striking. Many areas of go-go growth—the Southwest, California's Central Valley, much of Florida, eastern Colorado, Greater Atlanta—have been hard-hit. So too have portions of the Rust Belt, and a narrow east-west strip running from Tennessee into Arkansas. The places encompass run-down neighborhoods as well as areas with at least a veneer of



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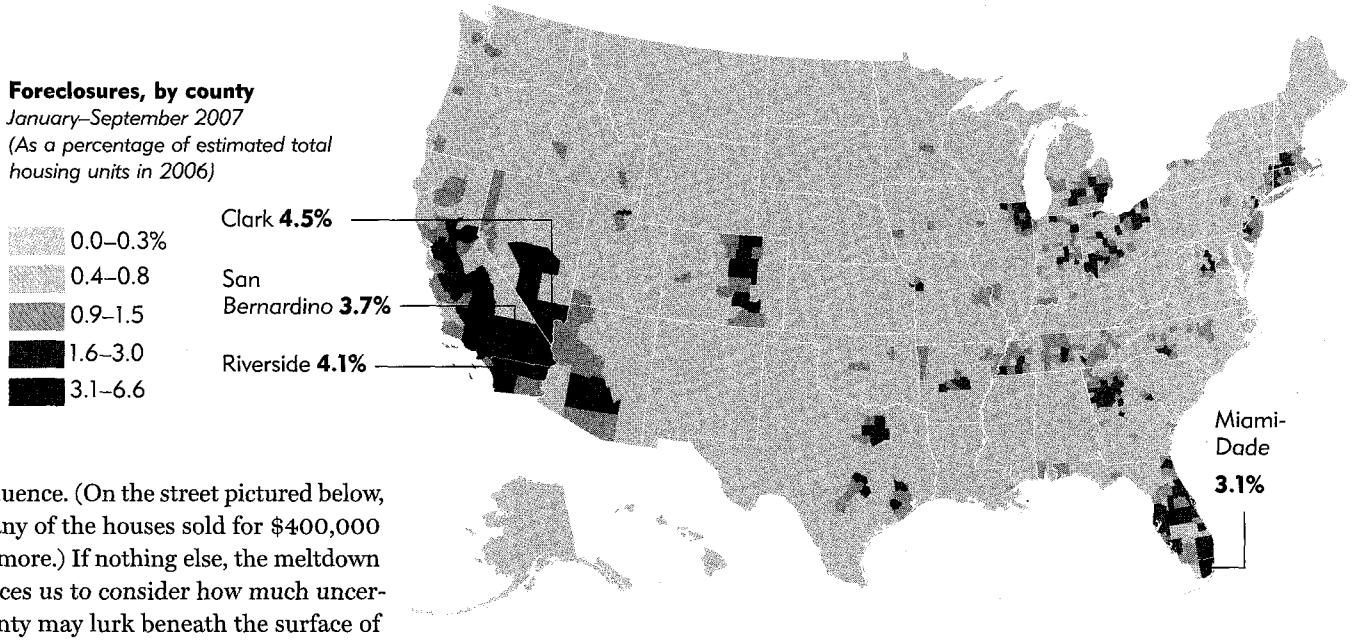

affluence. (On the street pictured below, many of the houses sold for $400,000 or more.) If nothing else, the meltdown forces us to consider how much uncertainty may lurk beneath the surface of apparent prosperity; an ample suburban house could be an asset or a liability, depending on the terms of the mortgage and the direction of the local market.

At first, the subprime crisis stung two groups in particular—people of modest means who'd gotten in over their heads, and a wealthier crowd, people working at hedge funds and investment houses, who'd trafficked in the first group's debt, fueling the market for exotic, unstable loans. One might find a measure of rough justice in the travails of the latter group (45 residences in Greenwich, Connecticut, home to many hedge-fund operators and investment bankers, were in foreclosure in the third quarter of 2007). But the ripples from the subprime crisis are now beginning to affect nearly everyone. A cooler housing market chills construction, consumer confidence, retail sales, and all the rest.

Not least, the crisis is harming the neighbors of people in foreclosure, even those who aren't having trouble making loan payments. According to one academic study, every foreclosure reduces the value of all other houses within an eighth of a mile by about 1 percent, as the sight of vacant property scares off potential buyers. Combine that with a market already in decline, and neighborhoods that begin to have troubles can go off the cliff. On the street pictured, three houses not in foreclosure have been languishing on the market for 72, 97, and 149 days; asking prices along the cul-de-sac vary widely, but average about $40,000 less than the comparable prices in the first two quarters of the year.

Still, the beat, if now more muted, goes on. On Miami's 99 JAMZ radio station, interspersed with spots for personal-injury lawyers and offers of lump-sum payments in exchange for pensions or legal settlements, an ad touts condos for people who've had trouble with credit in the past—just $500 down.

Matthew Yglesias, an *Atlantic* associate editor, blogs at matthewyglesias.theatlantic.com.

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The Chinese are subsidizing the American way of life. Are we playing them for suckers—or are they playing us?

BY JAMES FALLOWS

Illustration by Guy Billout

The $1.4 Trillion Question

Stephen Schwarzman may think he has image problems in America. He is the co-founder and CEO of the Blackstone Group, and he threw himself a $3 million party for his 60th birthday last spring, shortly before making many hundreds of millions of dollars in his company's IPO and finding clever ways to avoid paying taxes. That's nothing compared with the way he looks in China. Here, he and his company are surprisingly well known, thanks to blogs, newspapers, and talk-show references. In America, Schwarzman's perceived offense is greed—a sin we readily forgive and forget. In China, the suspicion is »

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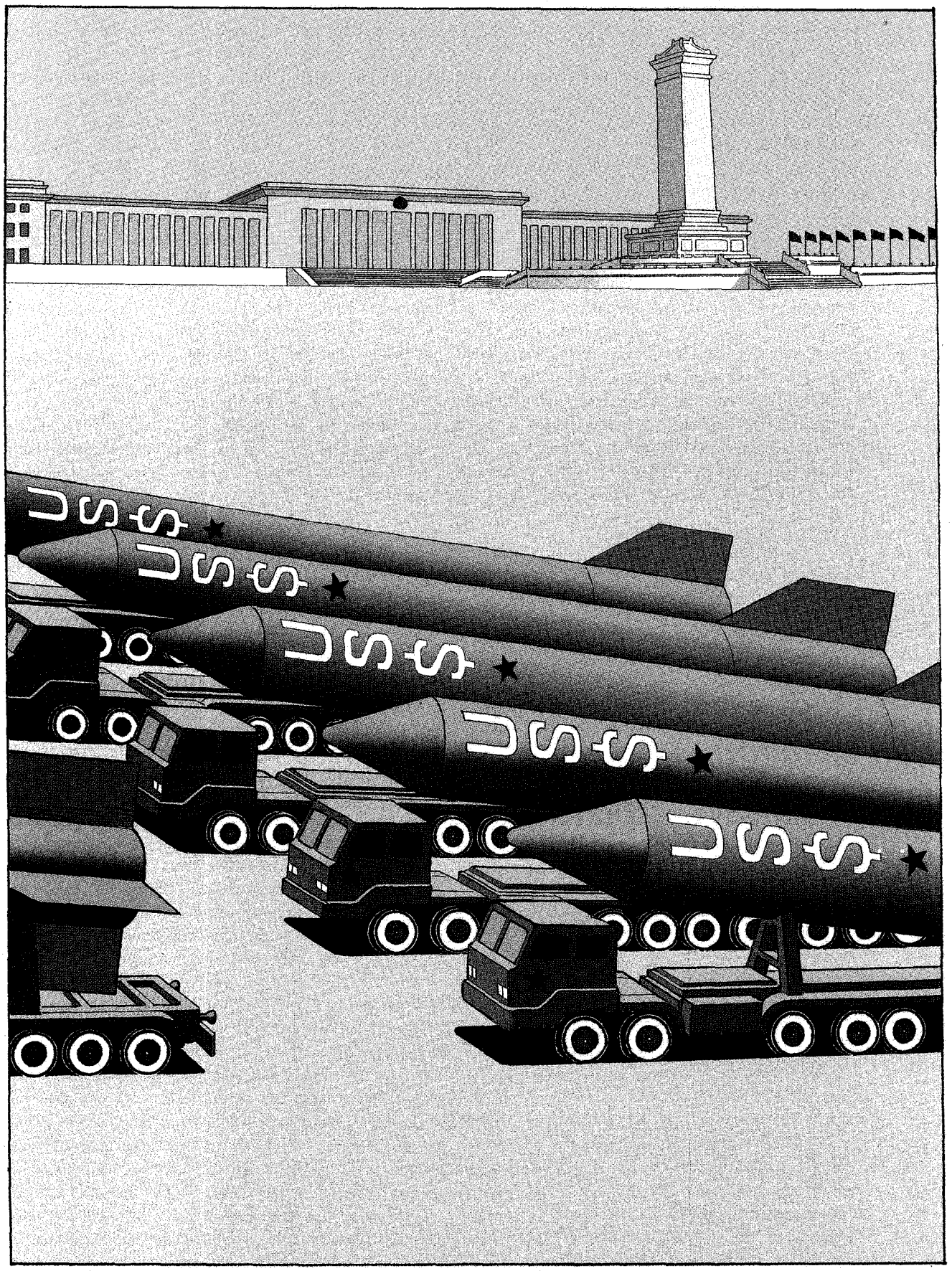

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that he has somehow hoodwinked ordinary Chinese people out of their hard-earned cash.

Last June, China's Blackstone investment was hailed in the American press as a sign of canny sophistication. It seemed just the kind of thing the U.S. government had in mind when it hammered China to use its new wealth as a "responsible stakeholder" among nations. By putting $3 billion of China's national savings into the initial public offering of America's best-known private-equity firm, the Chinese government allied itself with a big-time Western firm without raising political fears by trying to buy operating control (it bought only 8 percent of Blackstone's shares, and nonvoting shares at that). The contrast with the Japanese and Saudis, who in their nouveau-riche phase roused irritation and envy with their showy purchases of Western brand names and landmark properties, was plain.

Six months later, it didn't look so canny, at least not financially. China's Blackstone holdings lost, on paper, about $1 billion, during a time when the composite index of the Shanghai Stock Exchange was soaring. At two different universities where I've spoken recently, students have pointed out that Schwarzman was a major Republican donor. A student at Fudan University knew a detail I didn't: that in 2007 President Bush attended a Republican National Committee fund-raiser at Schwarzman's apartment in Manhattan (think what he would have made of the fact that Schwarzman, who was one year behind Bush at Yale, had been a fellow member of Skull and Bones). Wasn't the whole scheme a way to take money from the Chinese people and give it to the president's crony?

The Blackstone case is titillating in its personal detail, but it is also an unusually clear and personalized symptom of a deeper, less publicized, and potentially much more destructive tension in U.S.–China relations. It's not just Stephen Schwarzman's company that the *laobaixing*, the ordinary Chinese masses, have been subsidizing. It's everyone in the United States.

Through the quarter-century in which China has been opening to world trade, Chinese leaders have deliberately held down living standards for their own people and propped them up in the United States. This is the real meaning of the vast trade surplus—$1.4 trillion and counting, going up by about $1 billion per day—that the Chinese government has mostly parked in U.S. Treasury notes. In effect, every person in the (rich) United States has over the past 10 years or so borrowed about $4,000 from someone in the (poor) People's Republic of China. Like so many imbalances in economics, this one can't go on indefinitely, and therefore won't. But the way it ends—suddenly versus gradually, for predictable reasons versus during a panic—will make an enormous difference to the U.S. and Chinese economies over the next few years, to say nothing of bystanders in Europe and elsewhere.

Any economist will say that Americans have been living better than they should—which is by definition the case when a nation's total consumption is greater than its total production, as America's now is. Economists will also point out that, despite the glitter of China's big cities and the rise of its billionaire class, China's people have been living far worse than they could. That's what it means when a nation consumes only half of what it produces, as China does.

Neither government likes to draw attention to this arrangement, because it has been so convenient on both sides. For China, it has helped the regime guide development in the way it would like—and keep the domestic economy's growth rate from crossing the thin line that separates "unbelievably fast" from "uncontrollably inflationary." For America, it has meant cheaper iPods, lower interest rates, reduced mortgage payments, a lighter tax burden. But because of political tensions in both countries, and because of the huge and growing size of the imbalance, the arrangement now shows signs of cracking apart.

'From a distance, this, to say the least, is strange,' said Lawrence Summers—that a country with so many of its own needs still unmet would let 'this $1 trillion go to a mature, old, rich place.'

In an article two and a half years ago ("Countdown to a Meltdown," July/August 2005), I described an imagined future in which a real-estate crash and shakiness in the U.S. credit markets led to panic by Chinese and other foreign investors, with unpleasant effects for years to come. The real world has recently had inklings of similar concerns. In the past six months, relative nobodies in China's establishment were able to cause brief panics in the foreign-exchange markets merely by hinting that China might stop supplying so much money to the United States. In August, an economic researcher named He Fan, who works at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and did part of his doctoral research at Harvard, suggested in an op-ed piece in *China Daily* that if the U.S. dollar kept collapsing in value, China might move some of its holdings into stronger currencies. This was presented not as a threat but as a statement of the obvious, like saying that during a market panic, lots of people sell. The column quickly provoked alarmist

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stories in Europe and America suggesting that China was considering the "nuclear option"—unloading its dollars.

A few months later, a veteran Communist Party politician named Cheng Siwei suggested essentially the same thing He Fan had. Cheng, in his mid-70s, was trained as a chemical engineer and has no official role in setting Chinese economic policy. But within hours of his speech, a flurry of trading forced the dollar to what was then its lowest level against the euro and other currencies. The headline in the *South China Morning Post* the next day was: "Officials' Words Shrivel U.S. Dollar." Expressing amazement at the markets' response, Carl Weinberg, chief economist at the High Frequency Economics advisory group, said, "This would be kind of like Congressman Charlie Rangel giving a speech telling the Fed to hike or cut interest rates." (Cheng, like Rangel, is known for colorful comments—but he is less powerful, since Rangel after all chairs the House Ways and Means Committee.) In the following weeks, phrases like "run on the dollar" and "collapse of confidence" showed up more and more frequently in financial newsletters. The nervousness only increased when someone who does have influence, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, said last November, "We are worried about how to preserve the value" of China's dollar holdings.

When the dollar is strong, the following (good) things happen: the price of food, fuel, imports, manufactured goods, and just about everything else (vacations in Europe!) goes down. The value of the stock market, real estate, and just about all other American assets goes up. Interest rates go down—for mortgage loans, credit-card debt, and commercial borrowing. Tax rates can be lower, since foreign lenders hold down the cost of financing the national debt. The only problem is that American-made goods become more expensive for foreigners, so the country's exports are hurt.

When the dollar is weak, the following (bad) things happen: the price of food, fuel, imports, and so on (no more vacations in Europe) goes up. The value of the stock market, real estate, and just about all other American assets goes down. Interest rates are higher. Tax rates can be higher, to cover the increased cost of financing the national debt. The only benefit is that American-made goods become cheaper for foreigners, which helps create new jobs and can raise the value of export-oriented American firms (winemakers in California, producers of medical devices in New England).

The dollar's value has been high for many years—unnaturally high, in large part because of the implicit bargain with the Chinese. Living standards in China, while rising rapidly, have by the same logic been unnaturally low. To understand why this situation probably can't go on, and what might replace it—via a dollar crash or some other event—let's consider how this curious balance of power arose and how it works.

WHY A POOR COUNTRY HAS SO MUCH MONEY

By 1996, China amassed its first $100 billion in foreign assets, mainly held in U.S. dollars. (China considers these holdings a state secret, so all numbers come from analyses by outside experts.) By 2001, that sum doubled to about $200 billion, according to Edwin Truman of the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. Since then, it has increased more than sixfold, by well over a trillion dollars, and China's foreign reserves are now the largest in the world. (In second place is Japan, whose economy is, at official exchange rates, nearly twice as large as China's but which has only two-thirds the foreign assets; the next-largest after that are the United Arab Emirates and Russia.) China's U.S. dollar assets probably account for about 70 percent of its foreign holdings, according to the latest analyses by Brad Setser, a former Treasury Department economist now with the Council on Foreign Relations; the rest are mainly in euros, plus some yen. Most of China's U.S. investments are in conservative, low-yield instruments like Treasury notes and federal-agency bonds, rather than showier Blackstone-style bets. Because notes and bonds backed by the U.S. government are considered the safest investments in the world, they pay lower interest than corporate bonds, and for the past two years their annual interest payments of 4 to 5 percent have barely matched the 5-to-6-percent decline in the U.S. dollar's value versus the RMB.

Americans sometimes debate (though not often) whether in principle it is good to rely so heavily on money controlled by a foreign government. The debate has never been more relevant, because America has never before been so deeply in debt to one country. Meanwhile, the Chinese are having a debate of their own—about whether the deal makes sense for them. Certainly China's officials are aware that their stock purchases prop up 401(k) values, their money-market holdings keep down American interest rates, and their bond purchases do the same thing—plus allow our government to spend money without raising taxes.

"From a distance, this, to say the least, is strange," Lawrence Summers, the former treasury secretary and president of Harvard, told me last year in Shanghai. He was referring to the oddity that a country with so many of its own needs still unmet would let "this $1 trillion go to a mature, old, rich place from a young, dynamic place."

It's more than strange. Some Chinese people are rich, but China as a whole is unbelievably short on many of the things that qualify countries as fully developed. Shanghai has about the same climate as Washington, D.C.—and its public schools have no heating. (Go to a classroom when it's cold, and you'll see 40 children, all in their winter jackets, their breath forming clouds in the air.) Beijing is more like Boston. On winter nights, thousands of people mass along the curbsides of major thoroughfares, enduring long waits and fighting their way onto hopelessly overcrowded

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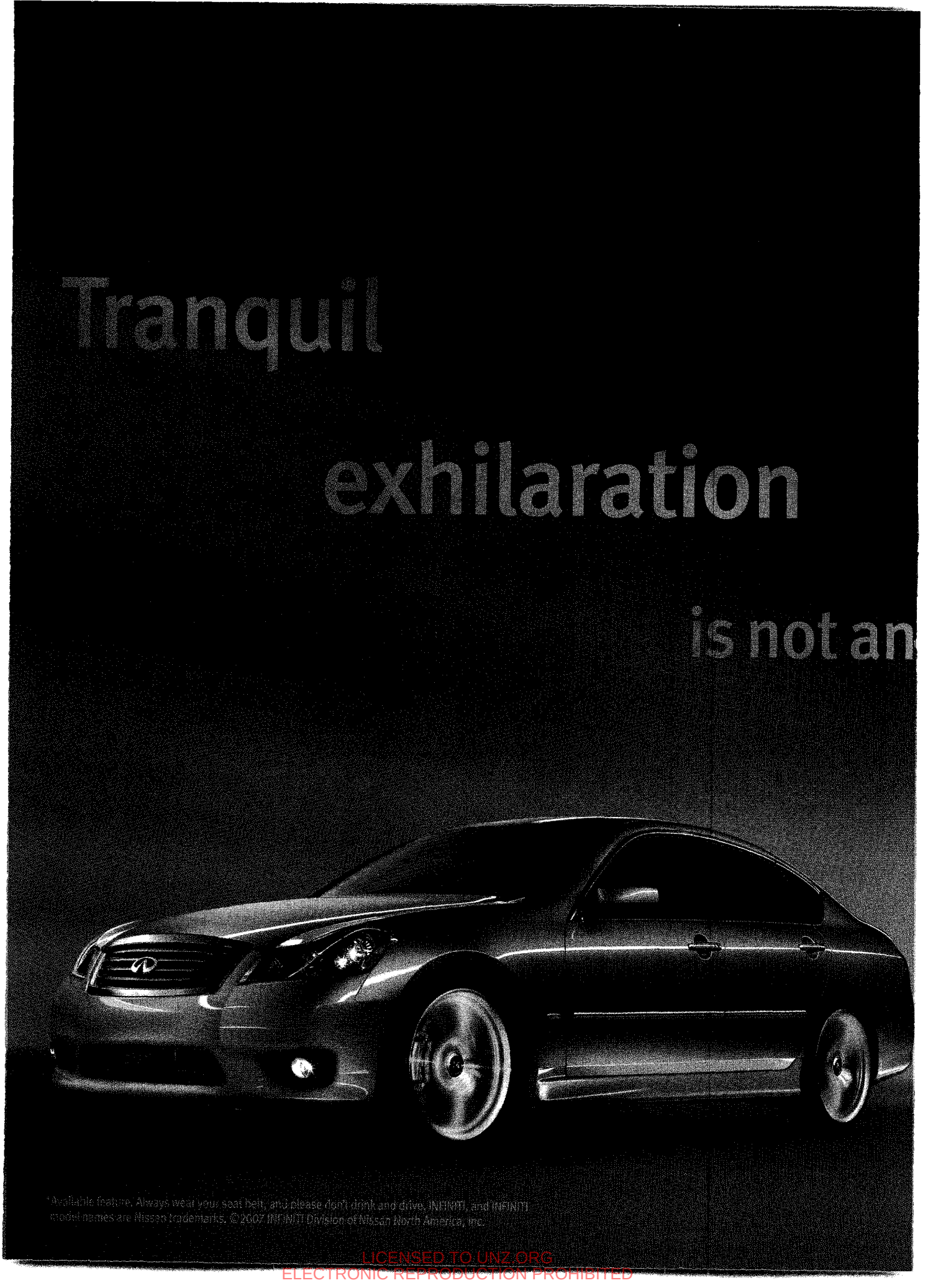

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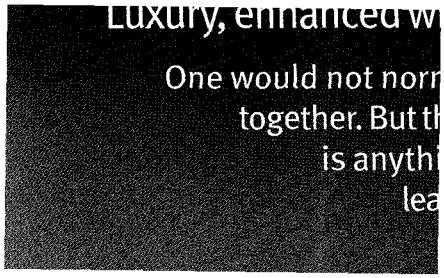

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public buses that then spend hours stuck on jammed roads. And these are the showcase cities! In rural Gansu province, I have seen schools where 18 junior-high-school girls share a single dormitory room, sleeping shoulder to shoulder, sardine-style.

Better schools, more-abundant parks, better health care, cleaner air and water, better sewers in the cities—you name it, and if it isn't in some way connected to the factory-export economy, China hasn't got it, or not enough. This is true at the personal level, too. The average cash income for workers in a big factory is about $160 per month. On the farm, it's a small fraction of that. Most people in China feel they are moving up, but from a very low starting point.

So why is China shipping its money to America? An economist would describe the oddity by saying that China has by far the highest national savings in the world. This sounds admirable, but when taken to an extreme—as in China—it indicates an economy out of sync with the rest of the world, and one that is deliberately keeping its own people's living standards lower than they could be. For comparison, India's savings rate is about 25 percent, which in effect means that India's people consume 75 percent of what they collectively produce. (Reminder from Ec 101: The savings rate is the net share of national output either exported or saved and invested for consumption in the future. Effectively, it's what your own people produce but don't use.) For Korea and Japan, the savings rate is typically from the high 20s to the mid-30s. Recently, America's has at times been below zero, which means that it consumes, via imports, more than it makes.

China's savings rate is a staggering 50 percent, which is probably unprecedented in any country in peacetime. This doesn't mean that the average family is saving half of its earnings—though the personal savings rate in China is also very high. Much of China's national income is "saved" almost invisibly and kept in the form of foreign assets. Until now, most Chinese have willingly put up with this, because the economy has been growing so fast that even a suppressed level of consumption makes most people richer year by year.

But saying that China has a high savings rate describes the situation without explaining it. Why should the Communist Party of China countenance a policy that takes so much wealth from the world's poor, in their own country, and gives it to the United States? To add to the mystery, why should China be content to put so many of its holdings into dollars, knowing that the dollar is virtually guaranteed to keep losing value against the RMB? And how long can its people tolerate being denied so much of their earnings, when they and their country need so much? The Chinese government did not explicitly set out to tighten the belt on its population while offering cheap money to American homeowners. But the fact that it does results directly from explicit choices it *has* made—two in particular. Both arise from crucial controls the government maintains over an economy that in many other ways has become wide open. The situation may be easiest to explain by following a U.S. dollar on its journey from a customer's hand in America to a factory in China and back again to the T-note auction in the United States.

THE VOYAGE OF A DOLLAR

Let's say you buy an Oral-B electric toothbrush for $30 at a CVS in the United States. I choose this example because I've seen a factory in China that probably made the toothbrush. Most of that $30 stays in America, with CVS, the distributors, and Oral-B itself. Eventually $3 or so—an average percentage for small consumer goods—makes its way back to southern China.

When the factory originally placed its bid for Oral-B's business, it stated the price in dollars: X million toothbrushes for Y dollars each. But the Chinese manufacturer can't use the dollars directly. It needs RMB—to pay the workers their 1,200-RMB ($160) monthly salary, to buy supplies from other factories in China, to pay its taxes. So it takes the dollars to the local commercial bank—let's say the Shenzhen Development Bank. After showing receipts or waybills to prove that it earned the dollars in genuine trade, not as speculative inflow, the factory trades them for RMB.

This is where the first controls kick in. In other major countries, the counterparts to the Shenzhen Development Bank can decide for themselves what to do with the dollars they take in. Trade them for euros or yen on the foreign-exchange market? Invest them directly in America? Issue dollar loans? Whatever they think will bring the highest return. But under China's "surrender requirements," Chinese banks can't do those things. They must treat the dollars, in effect, as contraband, and turn most or all of them (instructions vary from time to time) over to China's equivalent of the Federal Reserve Bank, the People's Bank of China, for RMB at whatever is the official rate of exchange.

With thousands of transactions per day, the dollars pile up like crazy at the PBOC. More precisely, by more than a billion dollars per day. They pile up even faster than the trade surplus with America would indicate, because customers in many other countries settle their accounts in dollars, too.

The PBOC must do something with that money, and current Chinese doctrine allows it only one option: to give the dollars to another arm of the central government, the State Administration for Foreign Exchange. It is then SAFE's job to figure out where to park the dollars for the best return: so much in U.S. stocks, so much shifted to euros, and the great majority left in the boring safety of U.S. Treasury notes.

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And thus our dollar comes back home. Spent at CVS, passed to Oral-B, paid to the factory in southern China, traded for RMB at the Shenzhen bank, "surrendered" to the PBOC, passed to SAFE for investment, and then bid at auction for Treasury notes, it is ready to be reinjected into the U.S. money supply and spent again—ideally on Chinese-made goods.

At no point did an ordinary Chinese person decide to send so much money to America. In fact, at no point was most of this money at his or her disposal at all. These are in effect enforced savings, which are the result of the two huge and fundamental choices made by the central government.

One is to dictate the RMB's value relative to other currencies, rather than allow it to be set by forces of supply and demand, as are the values of the dollar, euro, pound, etc. The obvious reason for doing this is to keep Chinese-made products cheap, so Chinese factories will stay busy. This is what Americans have in mind when they complain that the Chinese government is rigging the world currency markets. And there are numerous less obvious reasons. The very act of managing a currency's value may be a more important distorting factor than the exact rate at which it is set. As for the rate—the subject of much U.S. lecturing—given the huge difference in living standards between China and the United States, even a big rise in the RMB's value would leave China with a price advantage over manufacturers elsewhere. (If the RMB doubled against the dollar, a factory worker might go from earning $160 per month to $320—not enough to send many jobs back to America, though enough to hurt China's export economy.) Once a government decides to thwart the market-driven exchange rate of its currency, it must control countless other aspects of its financial system, through instruments like surrender requirements and the equally ominous-sounding "sterilization bonds" (a way of keeping foreign-currency swaps from creating inflation, as they otherwise could).

These and similar tools are the way China's government imposes an unbelievably high savings rate on its people. The result, while very complicated, is to keep the buying power earned through China's exports out of the hands of Chinese consumers as a whole. Individual Chinese people have certainly gotten their hands on a lot of buying power, notably the billionaire entrepreneurs who have attracted the world's attention (see "Mr. Zhang Builds His Dream Town," March 2007). But when it comes to amassing international reserves, what matters is that China as a whole spends so little of what it earns, even as some Chinese people spend a lot.

The other major decision is not to use more money to address China's needs directly—by building schools and agricultural research labs, cleaning up toxic waste, what have you. Both decisions stem from the central government's vision of what is necessary to keep China on its unprecedented path of growth. The government doesn't want to let the market set the value of the RMB, because it thinks that would disrupt the constant growth and the course it has carefully and expensively set for the factory-export economy. In the short run, it worries that the RMB's value against the dollar and the euro would soar, pricing some factories in "expensive" places such as Shanghai out of business. In the long run, it views an unstable currency as a nuisance in itself, since currency fluctuation makes everything about business with the outside world more complicated. Companies have a harder time predicting overseas revenues, negotiating contracts, luring foreign investors, or predicting the costs of fuel, component parts, and other imported goods.

And the government doesn't want to increase domestic spending dramatically, because it fears that improving average living conditions could paradoxically intensify the rich-poor tensions that are China's major social problem. The country is already covered with bulldozers, wrecking balls, and construction cranes, all to keep the manufacturing machine steaming ahead. Trying to build anything more at the moment—sewage-treatment plants, for a start, which would mean a better life for its own people, or smokestack scrubbers and related "clean" technology, which would start to address the world pollution for which China is increasingly held responsible—would likely just drive prices up, intensifying inflation and thus reducing the already minimal purchasing power of most workers. Food prices have been rising so fast that they have led to riots. In November, a large Carrefour grocery in Chongqing offered a limited-time sale of vegetable oil, at 20 percent (11 RMB, or $1.48) off the normal price per bottle. Three people were killed and 31 injured in a stampede toward the shelves.

This is the bargain China has made—rather, the one its leaders have imposed on its people. They'll keep creating new factory jobs, and thus reduce China's own social tensions and create opportunities for its rural poor. The Chinese will live better year by year, though not as well as

Spent at CVS, passed to Oral-B, paid to the factory, "surrendered" to the People's Bank of China, then bid at auction for Treasury notes, our dollar is reinjected into the U.S. money supply and spent again.

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they could. And they'll be protected from the risk of potentially catastrophic hyperinflation, which might undo what the nation's decades of growth have built. In exchange, the government will hold much of the nation's wealth in paper assets in the United States, thereby preventing a run on the dollar, shoring up relations between China and America, and sluicing enough cash back into Americans' hands to let the spending go on.

WHAT THE CHINESE HOPE WILL HAPPEN

The Chinese public is beginning to be aware that its government is sitting on a lot of money—money not being spent to help China directly, money not doing so well in Blackstone-style foreign investments, money invested in the ever-falling U.S. dollar. Chinese bloggers and press commentators have begun making a connection between the billions of dollars the country is sending away and the domestic needs the country has not addressed. There is more and more pressure to show that the return on foreign investments is worth China's sacrifice—and more and more potential backlash against bets that don't pay off. (While the Chinese government need not stand for popular election, it generally tries to reduce sources of popular discontent when it can.) The public is beginning to behave like the demanding client of an investment adviser: it wants better returns, with fewer risks.

This is the challenge facing Lou Jiwei and Gao Xiqing, who will play a larger role in the U.S. economy than Americans are accustomed to from foreigners. Lou, a longtime Communist Party official in his late 50s, is the chairman of the new China Investment Corporation, which is supposed to find creative ways to increase returns on at least $200 billion of China's foreign assets. He is influential within the party but has little international experience. Thus the financial world's attention has turned to Gao Xiqing, who is the CIC's general manager.

Twenty years ago, after graduating from Duke Law School, Gao was the first Chinese citizen to pass the New York State Bar Exam. He returned to China in 1988, after several years as an associate at the New York law firm Mudge, Rose (Richard Nixon's old firm) to teach securities law and help develop China's newly established stock markets. By local standards, he is hip. At an economics conference in Beijing in December, other Chinese speakers wore boxy dark suits. Gao, looking fit in his mid-50s, wore a tweed jacket and black turtleneck, an Ironman-style multifunction sports watch on his wrist.

Under Lou and Gao, the CIC started with a bang with Blackstone—the wrong kind of bang. Now, many people suggest, it may be chastened enough to take a more careful approach. Indeed, that was the message it sent late last year, with news that its next round of investments would be in China's own banks, to shore up some with credit problems. And it looks to be studying aggressive but careful ways to manage huge sums. About the time the CIC was making the Blackstone deal, its leadership and staff undertook a crash course in modern financial markets. They hired the international consulting firm McKinsey to prepare confidential reports about the way they should organize themselves and the investment principles they should apply. They hired Booz Allen Hamilton to prepare similar reports, so they could compare the two. Yet another consulting firm, Towers Perrin, provided advice, especially about staffing and pay. The CIC leaders commissioned studies of other large state-run investment funds—in Norway, Singapore, the Gulf States, Alaska—to see which approaches worked and which didn't. They were fascinated by the way America's richest universities managed their endowments, and ordered multiple copies of *Pioneering Portfolio Management*, by David Swensen, who as Yale's chief investment officer has guided its endowment to sustained and rapid growth. Last summer, teams from the CIC made long study visits to Yale and Duke universities, among others.

Gao Xiqing and other CIC officials have avoided discussing their plans publicly. "If you tell people ahead of time what you're going to do—well, you just can't operate that way in a market system," he said at his Beijing appearance. "What I can say is, we'll play by the international rules, and we'll be responsible investors." Gao emphasized several times how much the CIC had to learn: "We're the new kids on the block. Because of media attention, there is huge pressure on us—we're already under water now." The words "under water" were in natural-sounding English, and clearly referred to Blackstone.

Others familiar with the CIC say that its officials are coming to appreciate the unusual problems they will face. For instance: any investment group needs to be responsible to outside supervisors, and the trick for the CIC will be to make itself accountable to Communist Party leadership without becoming a mere conduit for favored investment choices by party bosses. How can it attract the best talent? Does it want to staff up quickly, to match its quickly mounting assets, by bidding for financial managers on the world market—where many of the candidates are high-priced, not fluent in Chinese, and reluctant to move to Beijing? Or can it afford to take the time to home-grow its own staff?

While the CIC is figuring out its own future, outsiders are trying to figure out the CIC—and also SAFE, which will continue handling many of China's assets. As far as anyone can tell, the starting point for both is risk avoidance. No more Blackstones. No more CNOOC-Unocals. (In 2005, the Chinese state oil firm CNOOC attempted to buy U.S.-based Unocal. It withdrew the offer in the face of intense political opposition to the deal in America.) One person involved with the CIC said that its officials had seen recent Lou Dobbs broadcasts criticizing "Communist China" and were "shellshocked" about the political resentment their

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investments might encounter in the United States. For all these reasons the Chinese leadership, as another person put it, "has a strong preference to follow someone else's lead, not in an imitative way" but as an unobtrusive minority partner wherever possible. It will follow the lead of others for now, that is, while the CIC takes its first steps as a gigantic international financial investor.

The latest analyses by Brad Setser suggest that despite all the talk about abandoning the dollar, China is still putting about as large a share of its money into dollars as ever, somewhere between 65 and 70 percent of its foreign earnings. "Politically, the last thing they want is to signal a loss of faith in the dollar," Andy Rothman, of the financial firm CLSA, told me; that would lead to a surge in the RMB, which would hurt Chinese exporters, not to mention the damage it would cause to China's vast existing dollar assets.

The problem is that these and other foreign observers must guess at China's aims, rather than knowing for sure. As Rothman put it, "The opaqueness about intentions and goals is always the issue." The mini-panics last year took hold precisely because no one could be sure that SAFE was not about to change course.

ever they buy, whatever they say, whatever they do will be seen as China Inc."

The fair reason for concern is, again, the transparency problem. Twice in the past year, China has in nonfinancial ways demonstrated the ripples that a nontransparent policy creates. Last January, its military intentionally shot down one of its own satellites, filling orbital paths with debris. The exercise greatly alarmed the U.S. military, because of what seemed to be an implied threat to America's crucial space sensors. For several days, the Chinese government said nothing at all about the test, and nearly a year later, foreign analysts still debate whether it was a deliberate provocation, the result of a misunderstanding, or a freelance effort by the military. In November, China denied a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, the *Kitty Hawk*, routine permission to dock in Hong Kong for Thanksgiving, even though many Navy families had gone there for a reunion. In each case, the most ominous aspect is that outsiders could not really be sure what the Chinese leadership had in mind. Were these deliberate taunts or shows of strength? The results of factional feuding within the leadership? Simple miscalculations? In the absence of clear official explanations no one really knew, and many assumed the worst.

It is no exaggeration to say that the stability of the U.S. and Chinese economies over the next few years depends on how today's tensions are resolved.

The uncertainty arises in part from the limited track record of China's new financial leadership. As one American financier pointed out to me: "The man in charge of the whole thing"—Lou Jiwei—"has never bought a share of stock, never bought a car, never bought a house." Another foreign financier said, after meeting some CIC staffers, "By Chinese terms, these are very sophisticated people." But, he went on to say, in a professional sense none of them had lived through the financial crises of the last generation: the U.S. market crash of 1987, the "Asian flu" of the late 1990s, the collapse of the Internet bubble soon afterward. The Chinese economy was affected by all these upheavals, but the likes of Gao Xiqing were not fully exposed to their lessons, sheltered as they were within Chinese institutions.

Foreign observers also suggest that, even after exposure to the Lou Dobbs clips, the Chinese financial leadership may not yet fully grasp how suspicious other countries are likely to be of China's financial intentions, for reasons both fair and unfair. The unfair reason is all-purpose nervousness about any new rising power. "They need to understand, and they don't, that everything they do will be seen as political," a financier with extensive experience in both China and America told me. "What-

So it could be with finance, unless China becomes as transparent as it is rich. Chinese officials say they will move in that direction, but they're in no hurry. Last fall, Edwin Truman prepared a good-governance scorecard for dozens of "sovereign wealth" funds—government-run investment funds like SAFE and the CIC. He compared funds from Singapore, Korea, Norway, and elsewhere, ranking them on governing structure, openness, and similar qualities. China's funds ended up in the lower third of his list—better-run than Iran's, Sudan's, or Algeria's, but worse than Mexico's, Russia's, or Kuwait's. China received no points in the "governance" category and half a point out of a possible 12 for "transparency and accountability."

Foreigners (ordinary Chinese too, for that matter) can't be sure about the mixture of political and strictly economic motives behind future investment decisions the Chinese might make. When China's president, Hu Jintao, visited Seattle two years ago, he announced a large purchase of Boeing aircraft. When France's new president, Nicolas Sarkozy, visited China late last year, Hu announced an even larger purchase of Airbuses. Every Chinese order for an airplane is a political as well as commercial decision. Brad Setser says that the Chinese government probably believed

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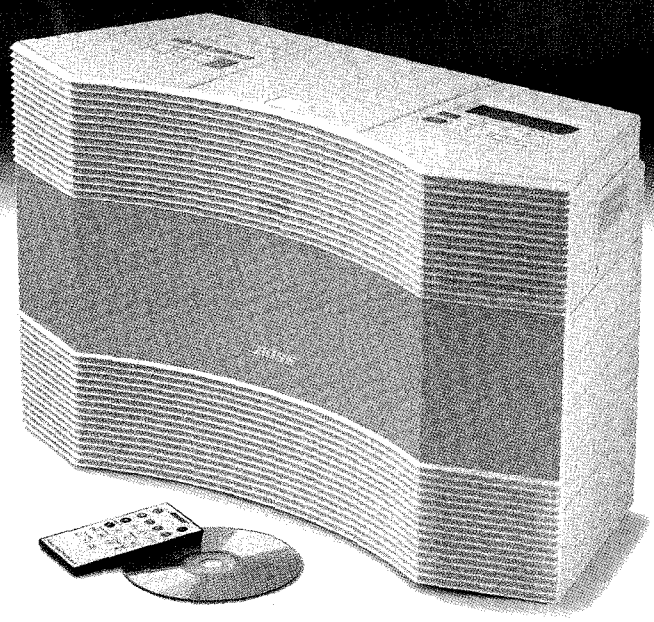

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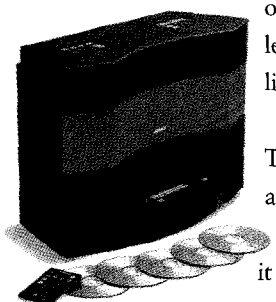

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that it would get "credit" for the Blackstone purchase in whatever negotiations came up next with the United States, in the same way it would get credit for choosing Boeing. This is another twist to the Kremlinology of trying to discern China's investment strategy.

Where the money goes, other kinds of power follow. Just ask Mikhail Gorbachev, as he reflects on the role bankruptcy played in bringing down the Soviet empire. While Japan's great wealth has not yet made it a major diplomatic actor, and China has so far shied from, rather than seized, opportunities to influence events outside its immediate realm, time and money could change that. China's military is too weak to challenge the U.S. directly even in the Taiwan Straits, let alone anyplace else. That, too, could change.

A BALANCE OF TERROR

Let's take these fears about a rich, strong China to their logical extreme. The U.S. and Chinese governments are always disagreeing—about trade, foreign policy, the environment. Someday the disagreement could be severe. Taiwan, Tibet, North Korea, Iran—the possibilities are many, though Taiwan always heads the list. Perhaps a crackdown within China. Perhaps another accident, like the U.S. bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade nine years ago, which everyone in China still believes was intentional and which no prudent American ever mentions here.

Whatever the provocation, China would consider its levers and weapons and find one stronger than all the rest—one no other country in the world can wield. Without China's billion dollars a day, the United States could not keep its economy stable or spare the dollar from collapse.

Would the Chinese use that weapon? The reasonable answer is no, because they would wound themselves grievously, too. Their years of national savings are held in the same dollars that would be ruined; in a panic, they'd get only a small share out before the value fell. Besides, their factories depend on customers with dollars to spend.

But that "reassuring" answer is actually frightening. Lawrence Summers calls today's arrangement "the balance of financial terror," and says that it is flawed in the same way that the "mutually assured destruction" of the Cold War era was. That doctrine held that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union would dare use its nuclear weapons against the other, since it would be destroyed in return. With allowances for hyperbole, something similar applies to the dollar standoff. China can't afford to stop feeding dollars to Americans, because China's own dollar holdings would be devastated if it did. As long as that logic holds, the system works. As soon as it doesn't, we have a big problem.

What might poke a giant hole in that logic? Not necessarily a titanic struggle over the future of Taiwan. A simple mistake, for one thing. Another speech by Cheng Siwei—perhaps in response to a provocation by Lou Dobbs. A rumor that the oil economies are moving out of dollars for good, setting their prices in euros. Leaked suggestions that the Chinese government is hoping to buy Intel, leading to angry denunciations on the Capitol floor, leading to news that the Chinese will sit out the next Treasury auction. As many world tragedies have been caused by miscalculation as by malice.

Or pent-up political tensions, on all sides. China's lopsided growth—ahead in exports, behind in schooling, the environment, and everything else—makes the country socially less stable as it grows richer. Meanwhile, its expansion disrupts industries and provokes tensions in the rest of the world. The billions of dollars China pumps into the United States each week strangely seem to make it harder rather than easier for Americans to face their own structural problems. One day, something snaps. Suppose the CIC makes another bad bet—not another Blackstone but another WorldCom, with billions of dollars of Chinese people's assets irretrievably wiped out. They will need someone to blame, and Americans, for their part, are already primed to blame China back.

So, the shock comes. Does it inevitably cause a cataclysm? No one can know until it's too late. The important question to ask about the U.S.–China relationship, the economist Eswar Prasad, of Cornell, recently wrote in a paper about financial imbalances, is whether it has "enough flexibility to withstand and recover from large shocks, either internal or external." He suggested that the contained tensions were so great that the answer could be no.

Today's American system values upheaval; it's been a while since we've seen too much of it. But Americans who lived through the Depression knew the pain real disruption can bring. Today's Chinese, looking back on their country's last century, know, too. With a lack of tragic imagination, Americans have drifted into an arrangement that is comfortable while it lasts, and could last for a while more. But not much longer.

Years ago, the Chinese might have averted today's pressures by choosing a slower and more balanced approach to growth. If they had it to do over again, I suspect they would in fact choose just the same path—they have gained so much, including the assets they can use to do what they have left undone, whenever the government chooses to spend them. The same is not true, I suspect, for the United States, which might have chosen a very different path: less reliance on China's subsidies, more reliance on paying as we go. But it's a little late for those thoughts now. What's left is to prepare for what we find at the end of the path we have taken.

James Fallows is an *Atlantic* national correspondent; his blog is at jamesfallows.theatlantic.com.

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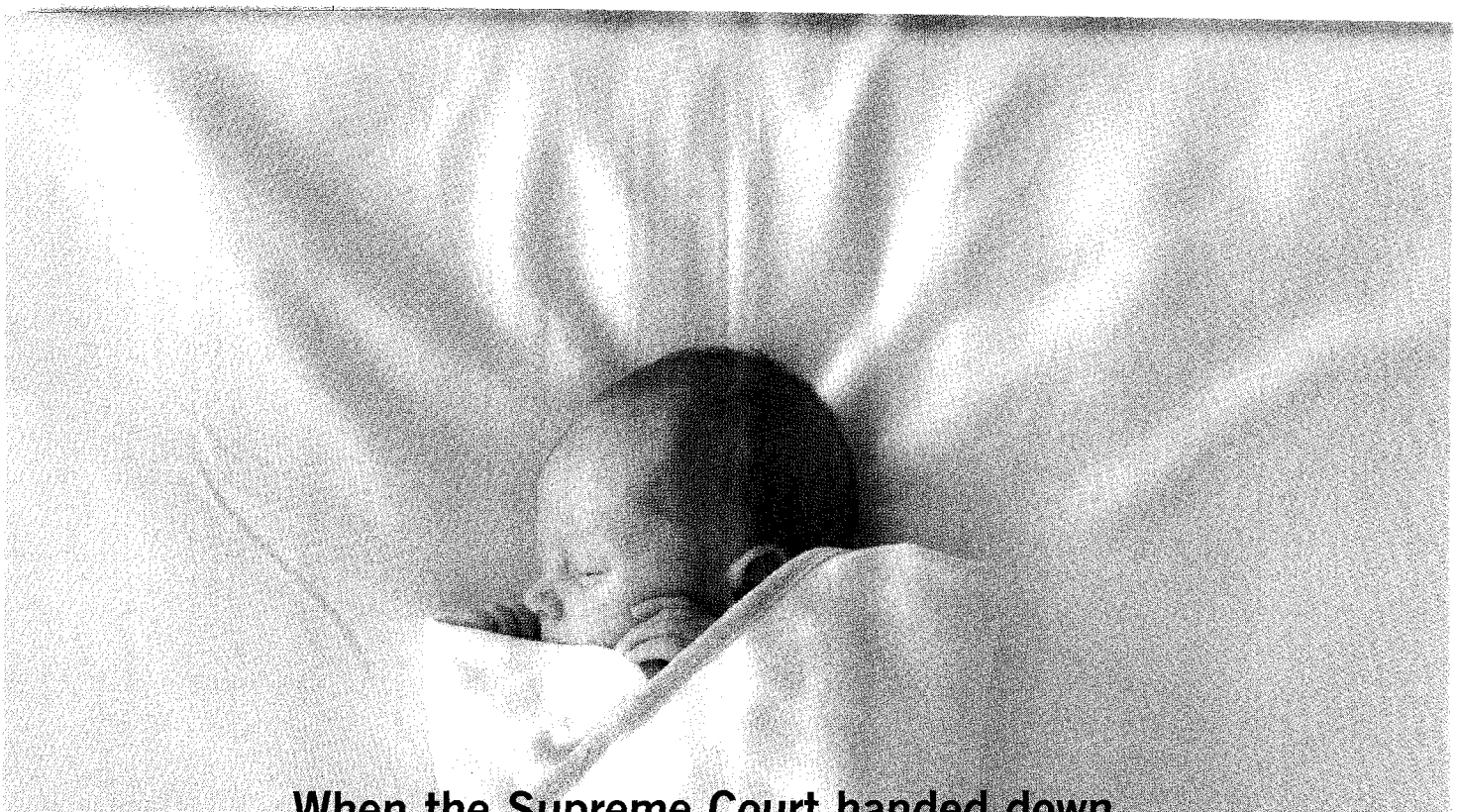

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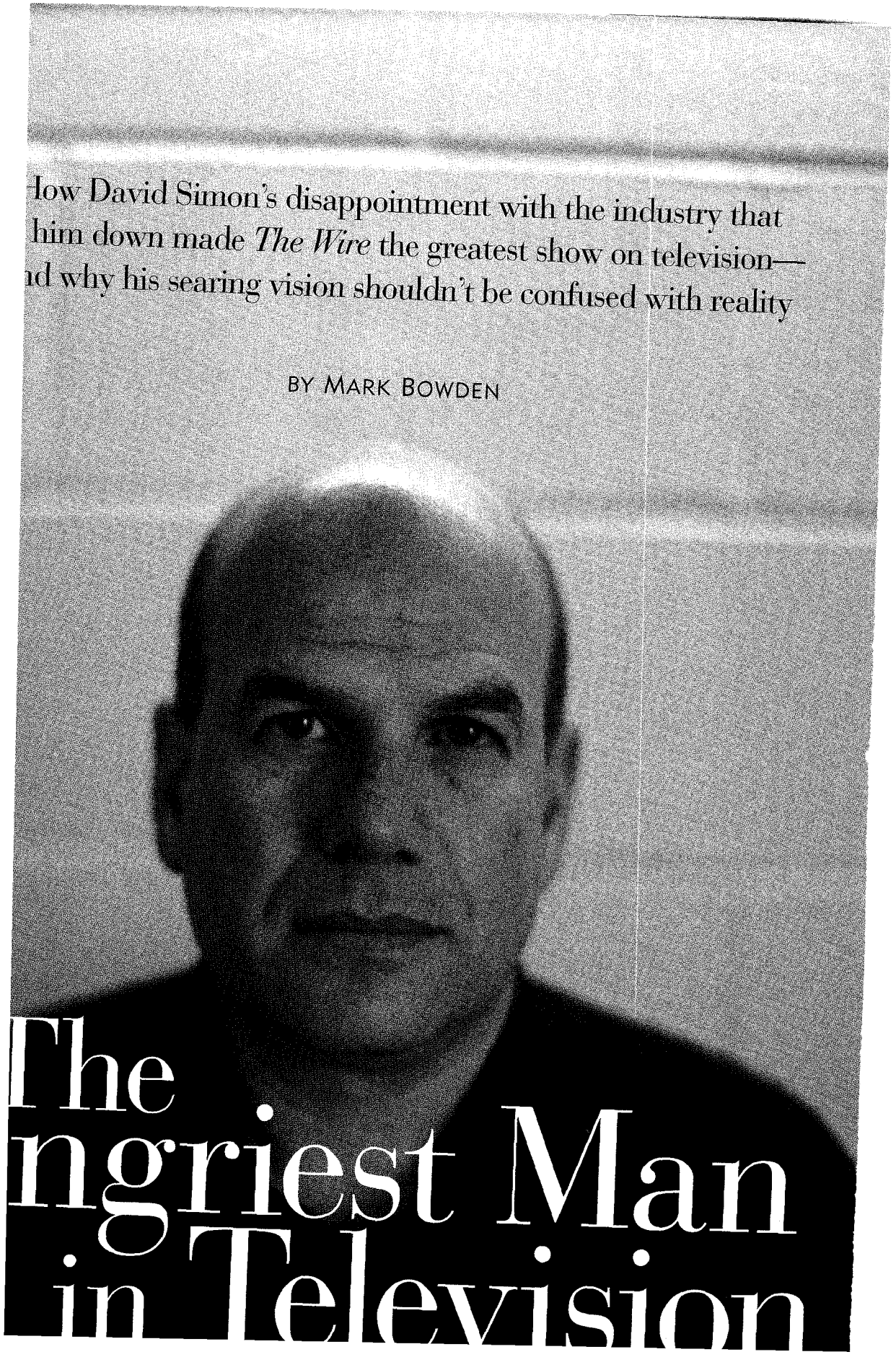

The ngriest Man in Television

How David Simon's disappointment with the industry that him down made *The Wire* the greatest show on television— nd why his searing vision shouldn't be confused with reality

BY MARK BOWDEN

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Behold the Hack, the veteran newsman, wise beyond his years, a man who's seen it all, twice. He's honest, knowing, cynical, his occasional bitterness leavened with humor. He's a friend to the little scam, and a scourge of the big one. Experience has acquainted him with suffering and stupidity, venality and vice. His anger is softened by the sure knowledge of his own futility. ¶ And now behold David Simon, the mind behind the brilliant HBO series *The Wire*. A gruff fireplug of a man, balding and big-featured, he speaks with an earthy, almost theatrical bluntness, and his blue-collar crust belies his comfortable suburban upbringing. He's for all the world the quintessential Hack, down to his ink-stained fingertips—the kind of old newshound who will remind you that a "journalist" is a dead reporter. But Simon takes the cliché one step further; he's an old newsman who feels betrayed by newspapers themselves.

For all his success and accomplishment, he's an angry man, driven in part by lovingly nurtured grudges against those he feels have slighted him, underestimated him, or betrayed some public trust. High on this list is his old employer *The Baltimore Sun*—or more precisely, the editors and corporate owners who have (in his view) spent the past two decades eviscerating a great American newspaper. In a better world—one where papers still had owners and editors who were smart, socially committed, honest, and brave—Simon probably would never have left *The Sun* to pursue a Hollywood career. His father, a frustrated newsman, took him to see Ben Hecht's and Charles MacArthur's classic newspaper farce, *The Front Page*, when he was a boy in Washington, D.C., and Simon was smitten. He landed a job as a *Sun* reporter just out of the University of Maryland in the early 1980s, and as he tells it, if the newspaper, the industry, and America had lived up to his expectations, he would probably still be documenting the underside of his adopted city one byline at a time. But *The Sun* let David Simon down.

So he has done something that many reporters only dream about. He has created his own Baltimore. With the help of his chief collaborator, Ed Burns, a former Baltimore cop and schoolteacher; a stable of novelists and playwrights with a feel for urban drama (including George Pelecanos, Richard Price, and Dennis Lehane); a huge cast of master actors; and a small army of film professionals shooting on location—in the city's blighted row-house neighborhoods and housing projects, in City Hall, nightclubs, police headquarters, in the suburbs, the snazzy Inner Harbor, the working docks—he has, over four seasons, conjured the city onscreen with a verisimilitude that's astonishing. Marylanders scrutinize the plot for its allusions to real people and real events. Parallels with recent local political history abound, and the details of life in housing projects and on street corners seem spookily authentic. (A New York City narcotics detective who loves the show told me a few years ago that street gangs in Brooklyn were watching it to learn tactics for avoiding cell-phone intercepts.)

Despite the show's dark portrait of "Body-more, Murdaland," local officialdom has embraced *The Wire*, giving Simon and his cast and crew free rein, opening up municipal buildings and cordoning off outdoor spaces. Many prominent citizens, including former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke and former Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich, have made cameo appearances. The dress, manners, and colorful language of the show's cast, which is largely African American, are painstakingly authentic, down to the uniquely slurred consonants and nasal vowel sounds of the local dialect, Balmerese. *The Wire* seems so real that I find myself, a Baltimore native, looking for the show's characters when I pass through their familiar haunts.

The show hasn't been a big commercial success. It's never attracted a viewership to rival that of an HBO tentpole series, like *The Sopranos* or even the short-lived *Deadwood*. It isn't seen as a template for future TV dramas, primarily because its form more or less demands that each season be watched from the beginning. Whereas each episode of *The Sopranos* advanced certain overarching plot points but was essentially self-contained, anyone who tries to plumb the complexities of *The Wire* by tuning in at mid-season is likely to be lost. If the standard Hollywood feature is the film equivalent of a short story, each season of Simon's show is a 12- or 13-chapter novel.

Some years ago, Tom Wolfe called on novelists to abandon the cul-de-sac of modern "literary" fiction, which he saw as self-absorbed, thumb-sucking gamesmanship, and instead to revive social realism, to take up as a subject the colossal, astonishing, and terrible pageant of contemporary America. I doubt he imagined that one of the best responses to this call would be a TV program, but the boxed sets blend nicely on a bookshelf with the great novels of American history.

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As *The Wire* unveiled its fourth season in 2006, Jacob Weisberg of *Slate*, in a much-cited column, called it "the best TV show ever broadcast in America." *The New York Times*, in an editorial (not a review, mind you) called the show Dickensian. I agree with both assessments. "*Wire*-world," as Simon calls it, does for turn-of-the-millennium Baltimore what Dickens's *Bleak House* does for mid-19th-century London. Dickens takes the byzantine bureaucracy of the law and the petty corruptions of the legal profession, borrows from the neighborhoods, manners, dress, and language of the Chancery courts and the Holborn district, and builds from them a world that breathes. Similarly, *The Wire* creates a vision of official Baltimore as a heavy, self-justified bureaucracy, gripped by its own byzantine logic and criminally unconcerned about the lives of ordinary people, who enter it at their own risk. One of the clever early conceits of the show was to juxtapose the organizational problems of the city police department with those of the powerful drug gang controlling trafficking in the city's west-side slums. The heads of both organizations, official and criminal, wrestle with similar management and personnel issues, and resolve them with similarly cold self-interest. In both the department and the gang, the powerful exploit the weak, and within the ranks those who exhibit dedication, talent, and loyalty are usually punished for their efforts.

There are heroes in *The Wire*, but they're flawed and battered. The show's most exceptional police officers, detectives Jimmy McNulty and Lester Freamon, find their initiative and talent punished at almost every turn. Their determination to do good, original work disturbs the department's upper echelons, where people are heavily invested in maintaining the status quo and in advancing their own careers. The clash repeatedly lands both of them in hot water—or cold water; at the end of the first season, the seasick-prone McNulty is banished to the city's marine unit. What success the two attain against Baltimore's most powerful criminals is partial, compromised, and achieved despite stubborn and often creative official resistance.

One measure of the complexity of Simon's vision is that the powerful obstructionists in *The Wire* aren't simply evil people, the way they might have been in a standard Hollywood movie. While some are just inept or corrupt, most are smart and ambitious, sometimes even interested in doing good, but concerned first and foremost with their next promotion or a bigger paycheck. They are fiercely territorial, to a degree that interferes with real police work. In the premiere episode, the very idea of a separate squad to target the leadership of the city's powerful drug gangs—which one would assume to be a high law-enforcement priority—is opposed by the police department. It's imposed on the commissioner by order of a local judge, who's outraged when a witness at a murder trial in his courtroom fearfully recants her testimony on the stand. To spite the judge, the commissioner staffs the unit with castoffs from various police divisions. Some of the castoffs are so alcoholic or corrupt they're useless, but some, like the lesbian detective Shakima Greggs, or the patient, wise Freamon, or the ballsy, streetwise McNulty, are castoffs precisely because of their ability. In Simon's world, excellence is a ticket out the door.

Each season of *The Wire* is a 12- or 13-chapter novel, and the show's boxed sets blend nicely on the bookshelf with the great novels of American history.

In one of the show's most interesting set pieces, a remarkable police major, "Bunny" Colvin, frustrated by the absurdity of the city's useless drug war, conducts a novel experiment. Without the knowledge of his superiors, he effectively legalizes drugs in West Baltimore, creating a mini-Amsterdam, dubbed "Hamsterdam," where all of the corner dealers are allowed to set up shop. By consolidating drug dealing, which he knows he cannot stop anyway, Colvin eliminates the daily turf battles that drive up the murder rates and dramatically improves life in most of his district. Calm returns to terrorized neighborhoods, and his patrolmen, freed from their cars and the endless pursuit of drug-dealing corner boys, return to real police work, walking beats, getting to know the people they serve. The sharp drop in his district crime stats shocks the department's leadership and makes Colvin's peers jealous—and suspicious. They assume he's cooking the books.

Again, it's a tribute to the depth of Simon's imagination that this experiment isn't presented as a cure-all. He doesn't minimize the moral compromise inherent in Hamsterdam. Many addicts see their severe health problems worsen, and the drug-dealing zone becomes a haven for vice of all kinds. Decent people in the community are horrified by the officially sanctioned criminality and the tolerance of destructive addiction. The experiment ends ignobly when news of the unauthorized

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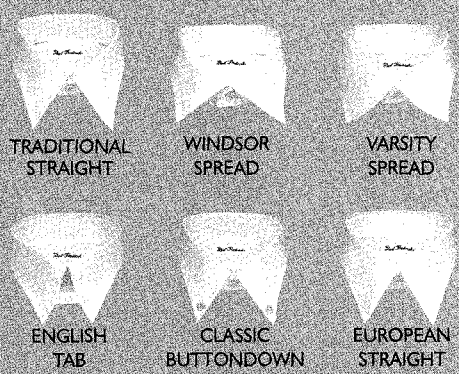

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experiment reaches the ears of a *Sun* reporter. City Hall reacts to the story with predictable horror, scurrying and spinning to escape blame. Colvin loses his job, and the city goes back to the old war, which is useless but politically acceptable.

Story lines like these reflect the truth about Baltimore; Mayor Schmoke's own promising political career crashed and burned some years ago when he had the temerity to suggest a less punitive approach to the city's drug problem. But they don't reflect the complete truth: like Dickens's London, Simon's Baltimore is a richly imagined caricature of its real-life counterpart, not a carbon copy. And precisely because the Baltimore in *The Wire* seems so real, down to the finest details, the show constitutes an interesting study in the difference between journalism and fiction. Simon's first book, *Homicide*, was a critically acclaimed work of nonfiction, from which some of the themes, characters, and even stories of *The Wire* are drawn. (It was also the basis for the 1990s NBC show *Homicide: Life on the Street*.) Which raises the question—if your subject is the real world, why deal in fiction?

"I am struck by how dark the show is," says Elijah Anderson, the Yale sociologist whose classic works *Code of the Streets*, *Streetwise*, and *A Place on the Corner* document black inner-city life with noted clarity and sympathy. Anderson would be the last person to gloss over the severe problems of the urban poor, but in *The Wire* he sees "a bottom-line cynicism" that is at odds with his own perception of real life. "The show is very good," he says. "It resonates. It is powerful in its depiction of the codes of the streets, but it is an exaggeration. I get frustrated watching it, because it gives such a powerful appearance of reality, but it always seems to leave something important out. What they have left out are the decent people. Even in the worst drug-infested projects, there are many, many God-fearing, churchgoing, brave people who set themselves against the gangs and the addicts, often with remarkable heroism."

This bleakness is Simon's stamp on the show, and it suggests that his political passions ultimately trump his commitment to accuracy or evenhandedness. The imagination, values, and convictions of a writer play a big part in even the most accurate nonfiction, of course. Telling a true story well demands that the reporter achieve his own understanding of the events and people described, and arriving at that point can mean shading reality, even if only unconsciously. We view the world from where we sit. Truman Capote, in his nonfiction classic, *In Cold Blood*, finds a clue to the motives of the murderers, Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, in unrequited or unconscious homosexual desire. Norman Mailer's preoccupation with mystical themes gives the senseless killer Gary Gilmore a romantic aura in *The Executioner's Song*. In *The Right Stuff*, Tom Wolfe's fascination with masculinity and social status allows him to cast the early space program as a prolonged reprise of ancient single-combat rituals. In each case, the author's unique perspective gives a "true" story a starkly original shape.

But the more passionate your convictions, the harder it is to resist tampering with the contradictions and stubborn messiness of real life. Every reporter knows the sensation of having a story "ruined" by some new and surprising piece of information. Just when you think you have the thing figured out, you learn something that shatters your carefully wrought vision. Being surprised is the essence of good reporting. But it's also the moment when

Given the power of *The Wire*, we ought to be grateful for David Simon's unforgiving nature. But his fiction shouldn't be mistaken for fact.

The answer has something to do with Simon's own passions and his deeply held political beliefs. "I *am* someone who's very angry with the political structure," he said in a long 2006 interview with *Slate*. "The show is written in a 21st-century city-state that is incredibly bureaucratic, and in which a legal pursuit of an unenforceable prohibition [the war on drugs] has created great absurdity." To Simon, *The Wire* is about "the very simple idea that, in this postmodern world of ours, human beings—all of us—are worth less. We're worth less every day, despite the fact that some of us are achieving more and more. It's the triumph of capitalism. Whether you're a corner boy in West Baltimore, or a cop who knows his beat, or an Eastern European brought here for sex, your life is worth less. It's the triumph of capitalism over human value. This country has embraced the idea that this is a viable domestic policy. It is. It's viable for the few. But I don't live in Westwood, L.A., or on the Upper West Side of New York. I live in Baltimore."

This is a message—a searing attack on the excesses of Big Capitalism—that rarely finds its way into prime-time entertainment on national TV. It's audacious. But it's also relentlessly ... well, *bleak*.

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a dishonest writer is tempted to fudge, for the sake of commercial success—and a more honest writer like Simon, whose passion is political and personal, is tempted to shift his energies to fiction.

Which is precisely what he's done. Simon is the reporter who knows enough about Baltimore to have his story all figured out, but instead of risking the coherence of his vision by doing what reporters do, heading back out day after day to observe, to ask more questions, to take more notes, he has stopped reporting and started inventing. He says, *I have figured this thing out.* He offers up his undisturbed vision, leaving out the things that don't fit, adding things that emphasize its fundamentals, and then using the trappings of realism to dress it up and bring it to life onscreen.

The essential difference between writing nonfiction and writing fiction is that the artist owns his vision, while the journalist can never really claim one, or at least not a complete one—because the real world is infinitely complex and ever changing. Art frees you from the infuriating unfinishedness of the real world. For this reason, the very clarity of well-wrought fiction can sometimes make it *feel* more real than reality. As a film producer once told me, "It's important not to let the facts get in the way of the truth."

Fiction can explain things that journalism cannot. It allows you to enter the lives and motivations of characters with far more intimacy than is typically possible in nonfiction. In the case of *The Wire*, fiction allows you to wander around inside a violent, criminal subculture, and inside an entrenched official bureaucracy, in a way that most reporters can only dream about. And it frees you from concerns about libel and cruelty. It frees you to be unfair.

In a session before a live audience in Baltimore last April, for a local storytelling series called The Stoop, Simon was asked to speak on a topic labeled "My Nemesis." He began by reciting, by name, some of the people he holds grudges against, going all the way back to grade school. He was being humorous, and the audience was laughing, but anyone who knows him knows that his monologue was, like his fiction, slightly overstated for effect, but basically the truth.

"I keep these names, I treasure them," he said:

> I will confess to you now that anything I have ever accomplished as a writer, as somebody doing TV, as anything I have ever done in life down to, like, cleaning up my room, has been accomplished because I was going to show people that they were fucked up and wrong and that I was the fucking center of the universe, and the sooner they got hip to that, the happier they would all be ... That's what's going on in my head.

This vindictive streak, this desire to show people how wrong they are, is tempered somewhat by Simon's sense of humor and his appreciation for complexity, and by the vision of his many skillful collaborators. But in the show's final season, which debuts in January, Simon will revisit the part of Baltimore that's closest to his heart, *The Sun*. The season, more than any other before it, will reflect his personal experience. Given his long memory and his inclination to settle old scores, the difference between fiction and fact will be of particular interest to his former colleagues.

The newspaper's management rightly viewed Simon's intentions with trepidation, but given that City Hall and the governor's mansion embraced his jaundiced vision, how could the Fourth Estate refuse to open its doors? So *The Sun* has allowed the show to use its name and even build an exact replica of its newsroom so that Simon and his company can flesh out their story line with greater authenticity. It isn't going to be a comfortable ride, because Simon is apparently set to exorcise some personal demons. His vision of Baltimore was shaped largely by his work as a crime reporter, and it seems likely that his anger about capitalism and the devaluation of human life is rooted in his unhappy experience at *The Sun*.

A famous quote from the great Sun Papers columnist H. L. Mencken is reprinted in large type on the wall of the spacious lobby in the newspaper's building on Calvert Street. It reads:

> ... as I look back over a misspent life, I find myself more and more convinced that I had more fun doing news reporting than in any other enterprise. It is really the life of kings.

It was that promise, that "life of kings," that animated Simon and many other reporters who started in the business 20 years ago.

"I love this place," Simon told the Stoop audience last April, speaking of his frame of mind at age 22, when he was starting his career as a *Sun* reporter:

> This is the place of H. L. Mencken, of Frank Kent, of William Manchester. It's like you can touch things that you can be proud of. I just have to do good work for its own sake ... I'm basically happy, and it's like the least ambitious I am in my life. Until ... it gets sold out of town. And these guys come in from Philly. The white guys from Philly. And I say that with all the contempt you can muster for the phrase *white guys*. Soulless motherfuckers. Everything that Malcolm X said in that book before he got converted back to humanity—no, no, he was right in the first place. These guys were so without humanity. And it was the kind of journalism—how do I describe bad

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journalism? It's not that it's lazy, it's that whenever they hear the word *Pulitzer*, they become tumescent. They become engorged ... All they wanted to do was win prizes ... I watched them single-handedly destroy *The Sun*.

The "white guys" Simon so viciously abused in this talk (and not for the first time) were William Marimow and John Carroll, notable newspapermen who are my friends; Marimow was a longtime colleague of mine at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He eventually left *The Sun* in conflict over newsroom cutbacks with its corporate owners (originally the Times-Mirror Corporation, which was absorbed by the Tribune Company in 2000) and went on to head the news division of National Public Radio. Last year, Marimow returned to helm *The Inquirer*, a newspaper where he had earlier won two Pulitzer Prizes for reporting. Carroll became editor in chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, resigned defending the newsroom there, and is now at Harvard University. Both have impeccable reputations in their field, and I hold them both in high esteem. Simon hates them.

He hates them in part because they were agents of change at *The Sun*, the institution he loved, initiating a process familiar in newsrooms all over the country. Just as the efforts of great detectives like McNulty and Freamon are neither valued nor supported by their bosses, many superb reporters and editors at *The Sun*, and with them the paper's higher mission, were betrayed by the corporate pursuit of profit margins. Marimow and Carroll were for a time agents of that process, an unpleasant role that many fine newspaper editors have found themselves in during the past decade. Yet to Simon they are all the more culpable because they didn't publicly object to a talent drain that he felt devastated the newsroom. There's nothing unique about the situation. The sad story is familiar to newspaper people all over the country. (I watched it happen at *The Inquirer*, where Knight Ridder threw just about everyone and everything of value overboard before bailing out of journalism altogether.)

Some of us chalk up this trend to market forces, to the evolution of information technology, to television, radio, and the Internet. At the long-since-departed *Baltimore News-American*, where I worked before being hired at *The Inquirer*, we used to joke that people didn't read our newspaper, they *played* it. The paper was full of number and word games, along with sports scores, racetrack results, TV listings, comics, want ads, and advertisements with clippable coupons. One by one, these multifarious reasons why people used to buy newspapers have been cherry-picked by newer media; that includes the paper's most basic offering—breaking news, whose headlines are now available on most cell phones. Declining circulation means declining advertising, which means declining revenues, so corporate managers face a tougher and tougher challenge maintaining the high profit margins that attracted investors 30 years ago. These are just facts, and different people and organizations have handled them with different measures of grace and understanding.

But to Simon, this complex process became personal, boiling down to corporate greed and the "soullessness" of Marimow and Carroll. It's an honest opinion, but arguably unfair, flavored by personal bitterness and animosity. (Simon told a writer from *American Journalism Review* that he was angered by the paper's unwillingness to grant him a raise after he returned from a leave of absence in 1995—he was writing *The Corner*—and he took a buyout

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As a lowering snowstorm
silk-screened the arboretum
into a gauzy tomb
around an ecosystem
of stalled summer in late autumn
(a terrarium's hot sanctum
inside a snow globe), steam
vagued the coin-pocked stream,
another closed system,
and I slid along the stem
of a tropical leaf a thumb
still frigid, slow to accustom
myself to the wispy steam
drifting like a phantom
through the rich spectrum
of greenery, each item
doomed outside the sanctum,
where alien yet tame
verdure thrives because it's tame.
Inside: one desideratum.
Outside, let's imagine: time
and the obscuring storm.
In a breath or two, I'll join them,
fingering a green stem,
a pinched and withering victim
that is, a card states, false thyme.

—ANDREW HUDGINS

Andrew Hudgins's most recent book of poems is *Ecstatic in the Poison* (2003). He teaches at Ohio State University.

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six months later.) Given his vindictive strain, his talent for character and drama, and the national TV show at his disposal, such an opinion is also a combustible one.

I should note here that it isn't hard to join Simon's enemies list; I did it myself while writing this essay. I first contacted Simon several years ago, as a fan of his show and as a screenwriter and aspiring producer interested in learning more about him and how he'd created it. He was friendly and helpful, and I remain grateful. Then in 2006 after the fourth season of *The Wire* had aired, I decided to write a tribute to Simon and his show. I contacted him by e-mail to see about renewing our conversation on different terms, and he consented. He asked me to avoid writing about his personal life, and I agreed. I was determined, as well, to avoid discussing his dispute with Marimow and Carroll, since I liked and admired both parties, and was disinclined to choose sides.

When I discovered, after my last conversation with Simon, that the final season of the show would be based on his experiences at *The Sun*, I felt compelled to describe the dispute, but I resolved to characterize it without *entering* it. To avoid exploiting anything that had passed informally between us on the subject, I relied on Simon's ample public commentary to explain his feelings, and then, realizing that the essay had strayed in an unanticipated direction, showed him an early draft to solicit correction and criticism. I got it. The draft provoked a series of angry, long-winded accusations, which would have remained private had he not taken his complaints to *The Atlantic*'s editor, in an angry letter impugning my motives in contacting him originally, and characterizing all our interactions as my attempt to win his confidence in order to skewer him on behalf of my friends. I could see myself morphing into a character in his show.

Simon has already given Marimow's name to a character in *The Wire*, a repellent police-department toady who, in the hilarious words of the show's Sergeant Jay Landsman, "doesn't cast off talent lightly, he heaves it away with great force." But this was just a minor swipe: the final season of *The Wire* will offer Simon the chance to take on his old enemies from *The Sun* directly. An article that appeared in the October 2000 issue of *Brill's Content* hinted at the tack he may take and went to the core of what he says are his objections to the pair. It featured Simon, then five years removed from the paper and well into his enormously successful second career, making the case that a widely respected *Sun* reporter, protected by Carroll and Marimow, was making up stories and distorting the truth in a hell-bent effort to turn a series on lead-paint poisoning into a competitive Pulitzer submission. Simon felt the editors purposefully ignored the misgivings of some of the newspaper's veteran reporters in an effort to bolster their new star. To the editors, it was a case of an aggressive reporter who had made a few mistakes in pursuit of an important story. To Simon, it was an example of all that was wrong with the remade newspaper, and a reminder of the clash over journalistic values that had led him to quit in the first place. In his mind, *The Sun* had also abandoned its mission to really cover Baltimore, and was now fiddling while the city burned. Instead of exploring the root causes of the city's intractable problems—drug abuse and the government's unenforceable "war" against it, racism, poverty, rampant Big Capitalism, etc.—the newspaper was engaged in a largely self-congratulatory crusade to right a minor wrong.

Sure enough, one of the upcoming season's story lines deals with a newspaper's muckraking campaign on homelessness. It's likely been crafted to represent Simon's take on a typical Carroll-Marimow project: motivated less by a sincere desire for social reform than by a zeal for Pulitzer Prizes. (The paper did, incidentally, win three Pulitzers under the editors' guidance. Normally, in the newspaper world, this is considered a triumph, but for Simon it just adds bitter spice to an already bad dish.) And whereas the *Brill's* reporter who wrote the story was painstakingly evenhanded, Simon's fictional version of events will carry no such journalistic burden.

Apart from the distress this causes the real people behind his sometimes thinly veiled depictions, there's nothing necessarily wrong with this. It's how an artist shapes a fictional drama out of his own experience. Simon is entitled to his take on things, entitled to exploit his memory and experience, his anger and sense of betrayal, just as he exploited his cynicism and political outrage about official Baltimore in the show's first four seasons. Indeed, given the richness and power of his vision in *The Wire*, we ought to be grateful for his unforgiving nature. The kind of reporting he felt could no longer be done at *The Sun* he has brought to the screen. But his fiction shouldn't be mistaken for fact. It reflects, as much as anything, Simon's own prejudices.

In my decades in newsrooms, I encountered my share of hard-core skeptics like Simon, but those resembling the stereotypical Hack were the exceptions. It is true that the more true stories you tell, the more acquainted you are with suffering, stupidity, venality, and vice. But you're also more acquainted with selflessness, courage, and decency. Old reporters and editors are softened by knowledge and experience. If anything, they become less inclined to suspect or condemn. They encounter incompetence more often than evil, and they see that very few people who screw up do so in ways that are indefensible. After years of drumming up the other side of the story, old reporters are likely to grow less angry and opinionated, not more.

In that sense only, David Simon may be truer to the stereotype than the stereotype is true.

Mark Bowden is an *Atlantic* national correspondent.

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A Berlitz guide to Washington English

Frankly...

BY DANA MILBANK

Illustrations by Barry Blitt

Just as modern French-speakers who travel to Quebec often find the dialect of French Canadians to be archaic and quaint, English-speakers who visit Washington, D.C., are frequently bemused by the language spoken there. Though the Potomac dialect shares the alphabet and grammar of English, it has a vocabulary all its own. A few examples of Potomac phrases, followed by their English equivalents:

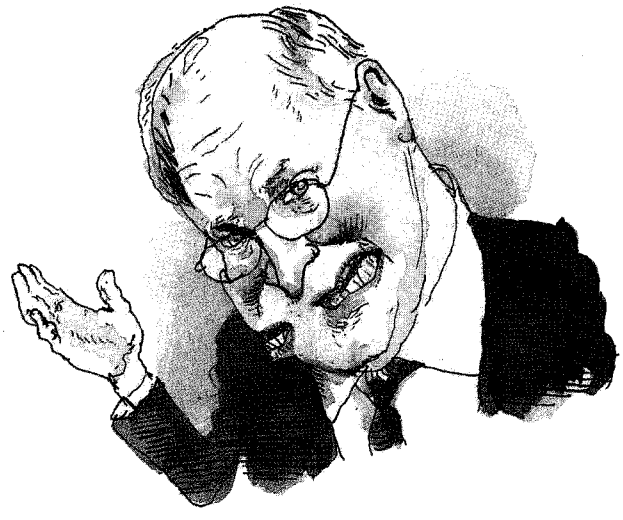
I have great respect for the senior senator.
I am about to drill my elderly colleague a new one.

We have full confidence in his integrity.
We will cut him loose by nightfall.

I don't pay attention to the polls.
My job-approval rating is 32 percent.

I had some gals come over to the condo to give me a massage.
I paid for sex.

When we have something to announce, we'll announce it.
We know the answer, but we're not going to tell you.



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Frankly ...
The following statement is false.

You are either with us or against us.
You are against us.

We identified weapons of mass destruction–related program activities.
We could not find any weapons of mass destruction.

I hope we can work together in a bipartisan way.
I need to pick off one senator from the other party to pass this bill.

The president has always said ...
The president is announcing a new position.

I don't know how to get you to get it through your heads that it's not new.
I am disappointed that you noticed that I switched positions.

I am the decider.
My authority is in question.

I am a commander guy.
My authority is all but gone.

This should not be a political issue.
My party has a winning political issue.

It's time to stop playing politics.
The other party has a winning political issue.

As I said in my *Wall Street Journal* op-ed last week ...
I am so important that I can quote myself.

Pockets of dead-enders are trying to reconstitute.
The enemy is winning.

They're in the last throes, if you will.
The enemy has won.

Thank you for the very frank and candid discussion.
You just spit in my eye.

As long as needed and not one day longer.
We have no idea how long this will take.

War is my last choice.
The bombing begins in three weeks.

The American people don't want open-ended fishing expeditions.
A member of my party is being investigated for wrongdoing.

Congress must fulfill its constitutional oversight obligation.
A member of the other party is being investigated for wrongdoing.

I will continue to do the people's business.
I expect to be indicted.

Dana Milbank is a columnist for *The Washington Post* and the author of the recently published *Homo Politicus: The Strange and Scary Tribes That Run Our Government* (Doubleday), from which this has been adapted.

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Waterworld

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

The monsoon arrived while I was in a shallow-draft boat traveling over a village that was now underwater. In its place was a mile-wide channel, created by erosion over the years, separating the mainland of Bangladesh from a *char*—a temporary delta island that would someday dissolve just as easily as it had formed. ¶ As ink-dark, vertical cloud formations slid in from the Bay of Bengal, waves began slapping hard against the »

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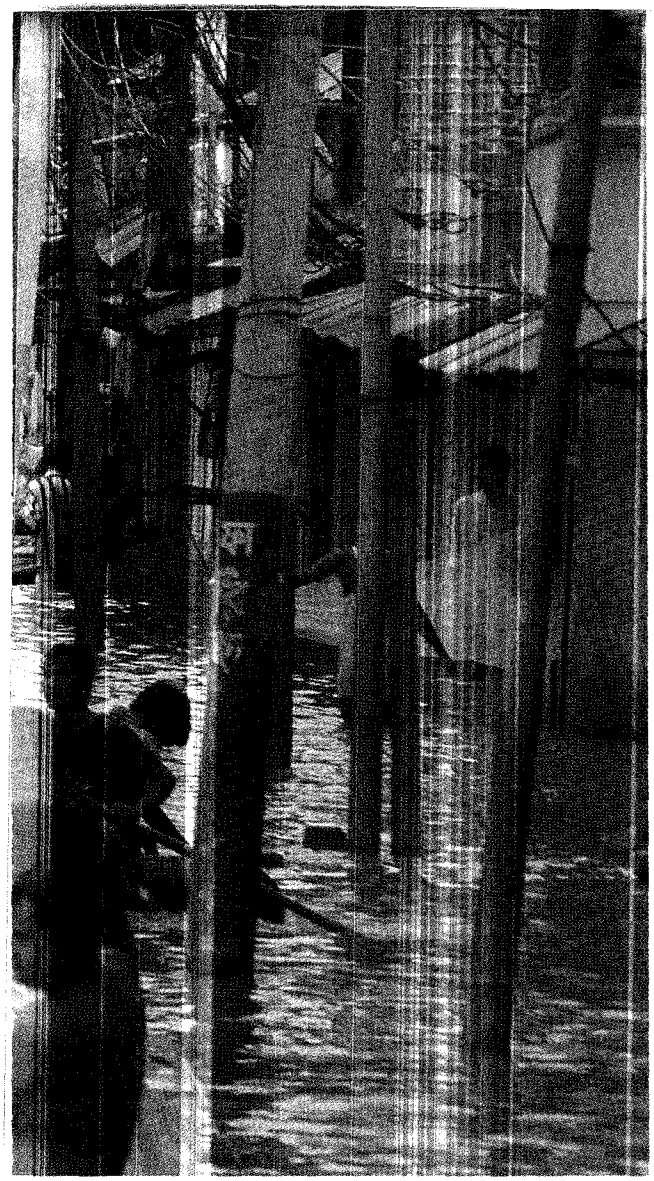

SHAFIQUL ISLAM/WPN

With rising Islamic fundamentalism, weak government, and not enough dry land for its 150 million people, Bangladesh could use a break. Instead, it must face the catastrophic threat of climate change.

rotting wood of our small boat. Breaking days of dense, soupy heat, rain fell like nails upon us. We started bailing. The boatman, my translator, and I made it to the char before the channel water that was splashing into the hull, heavy with silt, could threaten the boat's buoyancy. It was a lot of work just to see something that was no longer there.

On another day, in order to see a series of dam collapses that had forced the evacuation of more than a dozen villages, I rode on the back of a motorcycle along a maze of embankments framing a checkerwork of paddy fields that glinted in the steamy rain. Again, the sight that greeted me—a few crumbled earthen dams—was not dramatic, unless, that is, you were holding the "before" picture in front of you.

Yet from one end of Bangladesh to the other, I saw plenty of drama, encapsulated in this singular fact: remoteness and fragility of terrain never once corresponded with a paucity of humanity. Even on the chars, I could not get away from people cultivating every inch of alluvial soil. Human beings were everywhere on this dirty wet sponge of a landscape. Squeezed into an Iowa-sized territory—20 to 60 percent of which floods every year—is a population half the size of that in the United States and larger than the one in Russia. Indeed, Bangladesh's Muslim population alone (83 percent of the total) is nearly twice that of either Egypt or Iran. Considered small only because it is surrounded on three sides by India, Bangladesh is actually a vast aquascape, where getting around by boat and vehicle, as I learned, can take many days.

I went through towns that had a formal reality as names on a map, but were little more than rashes of rusted-corrugated-iron and bamboo stalls under canopies of jackfruit trees, teeming with men wearing skirt-like *lungis* and baseball caps and women in burkas that concealed all but their eyes and noses. Between the towns were long lines of water-filled pits, topped with a green froth of hyacinths; the soil had been removed to raise the road a few feet above the unrelieved sea-level flatness. Soil is a commodity so precious in Bangladesh that people dredge riverbeds during the dry season to get more of it. When houses are dismantled, the ground on which they stand is transported through slurry pipes to the new location.

In every respect, people were squeezing the last bit of use out of the land. One day I saw a man carried by on a

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stretcher moments after he had been mauled by a Royal Bengal tiger. It is not an uncommon occurrence. As fishing communities crowd in on one of the tigers' last refuges in the mangrove swamps of the western Bangladeshi-Indian border area, and as salinity from rising sea levels reduces the deer population on which the tigers feed, man and tiger have nowhere else to go.

The Earth has always been unstable. Flooding and erosion, cyclones and tsunamis are the norm rather than the exception. But never have the planet's most environmentally frail areas been so crowded. The slowdown in the growth rate of the world's population has not changed the fact that the number of people living in the countries most vulnerable to natural disasters continues to increase. The Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 was merely a curtain-raiser. Over the coming decades, Mother Nature is likely to kill or make homeless a staggering number of people.

American journalists sometimes joke that, in terms of news, thousands of people displaced by floods in Bangladesh equals a handful of people killed or displaced closer to home. But that formula is now as unimaginative and out-of-date as it is cruel.

With 150 million people packed together at sea level, Bangladesh is vulnerable to the slightest climatic variation, never mind the changes caused by global warming. The partial melting of Greenland ice over the course of the 21st century could inundate a substantial amount of Bangladesh with salt water. A 20-centimeter rise in the Bay of Bengal by 2030 could be devastating to more than 10 million people, says Atiq Rahman, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies.

While scholars debate the odds of such scenarios, one thing is certain: Bangladesh is the most likely spot on the planet for one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes in history. The country's future, however, and the fate of its impoverished millions, will be determined not necessarily by rising sea levels, but by their interaction with, among other things, the growth of religious fundamentalism, the behavior of its neighbors and other outside powers, and the evolution of democracy. So, I came to Bangladesh.

Atop the Bay of Bengal, the numberless braids of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers have formed the world's largest, youngest estuarine delta and one of its most dynamic. It is, in effect, the world's biggest flush toilet. Once a year, over the space of four months, God yanks the handle. First comes the snowmelt in the Himalayas, swelling the three great rivers. Then, in June, comes the monsoon from the south, up from the Bay of Bengal.

Calamity threatens when the amount of water arriving by river, sea, or sky is tampered with, whether by God or by humans. India, for example, is appropriating Ganges water for irrigation schemes, limiting freshwater flows into Bangladesh from the north, causing drought. Meanwhile, to the south, in the Bay of Bengal, global warming appears to be causing a rise in sea levels that is bringing salt water and sea-based cyclones farther inland. Salinity—the face of global warming in Bangladesh—threatens trees and crops and contaminates wells. And the less fresh river water that comes down from India, the greater the hydrologic vacuum that sucks salt water northward into the countryside.

Yet Bangladesh is less interesting as a hydrologic horror show than as a model of how humankind copes with an extreme natural environment. Weather and geography have historically worked here to cut one village off from another. Central government arrived only with the Turkic Moguls in the 16th century, but neither they nor their British successors truly penetrated the countryside. The major roads were all built after independence in 1971. This is a society that never waited for a higher authority to provide it with anything. The isolation effected by floodwaters and monsoon rains has encouraged institutions to develop at the local level. As a result, the political culture of rural Bangladesh is more communal than hierarchical, and women play a significant role.

Four hours' drive northwest of Dhaka, the capital, I found a village in a Muslim-Hindu area where the women had organized themselves into separate committees to produce baskets and textiles and invest the profits in new wells and latrines. They had it all figured out, showing me

SEA CHEST

In the junk shop stood an old wood chest,
patina of ships and the sea, use and years;
the box heavy, empty, forgotten, set apart.
On the lid stenciled in bulky black a sort of tattoo,
the legend read JOHN SLATE / LIVERPOOL.
I wanted to ask but never found out, was Slate
out of Liverpool or *bound for* it? Down one end,
small letters read E. S. LIVERPOOL. Is that his son,
or did that have to be another? Watch by the sea,
I think, stand there till an aura grows clear like
some maritime koan, or a bottle, frosted and cracked,
holding a slip of paper, riding the tide.

—STEPHEN SANDY

Stephen Sandy's most recent book of poems is *Weathers Permitting* (2005). He lives in Vermont.

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on a crude cardboard map where the new facilities would be installed. They received help from a local nongovernmental organization that, in turn, had a relationship with CARE. But the organizational heft was homegrown.

In a mangrove swamp in the southwest, at a fishing village of bamboo-thatched huts, I watched a local NGO perform a play about climate change. It emphasized the need to conserve rainwater through catchments and to plant trees against erosion. Hundreds of villagers were there. I was the only foreigner. Afterward, they showed me the catchments that they had already built to direct rainwater into their wells.

Through similar bottom-up, purely voluntary means, the total fertility rate in Bangladesh has been cut from seven children born per woman after independence to three now—a striking achievement, given the value placed on children as laborers in a traditional agricultural society. Polio had been eradicated, before a recent reinfection from India. Despite all of Bangladesh's predicaments, it has gone from starving in the mid-1970s to feeding itself for the past two decades.

The credit for coping so well rests ultimately with NGOs. As familiar as their work now is, NGOs in Bangladesh represent a whole new organizational life-form; thousands of them fill the void between village committees and a remote, badly functioning central government.

Of course, this enhanced role raises ethical questions, not least because many of these Bangladeshi humanitarian enterprises have for-profit elements. Take Muhammad Yunus, who, along with his Grameen Bank, won the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for pioneering micro-credit schemes for poor women: Grameen also operates a cell-phone and Internet service. Then there is the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, which, besides doing bounteous relief and development work, operates dairy, poultry, and clothing businesses. Its head offices, like those of Grameen, are in a skyscraper that is some of Dhaka's most expensive real estate. Yet to focus on the impurities of these NGOs is to ignore their transformative powers.

"One thing led to another," explains Mushtaque Chowdhury, BRAC's deputy executive director. "In order not to be dependent on Western charities, we set up our own for-profit printing press in the 1970s. Then we built a plant to pasteurize milk from the cattle bought by poor women with the loans we had provided them." Now they've become a kind of parallel government, with a presence in 60,000 villages.

Just as cell phones have allowed developing countries to make an end run around the need for a hard-wired communications grid, Bangladesh shows how NGOs can make an end run around dysfunctional governments. Because Bangladeshi NGOs are supported by international donors, they have been indoctrinated with international norms to an extent unmatched by the private sector here.

The linkage between a global community on one hand and a village community on the other has made Bangladeshi NGOs intensely aware of the worldwide significance of their country's environmental plight. "Come, come, I will show you the climate change," said Mohon Mondal, a local NGO worker in the southwest, referring to a bridge that had partially collapsed because of rising seawater. To some degree, this awareness feeds a mindset in which every eroded embankment becomes an indictment against the United States for walking away from the Kyoto accords. (Muslim Bangladeshis are in almost every other way pro-American—the upshot of their historical dislike for their former colonial master, Great Britain; frequent intimidation by nearby India and China; and lingering hostility toward Pakistan stemming from the 1971 war for liberation.) But regardless of the merits of this case, the United States can't just defend its own position. As the world's greatest power, the U.S. must be seen to take the lead against global warming, or suffer the fate of being blamed for it. Bangladesh demonstrates how developing-world misery has acquired—in the form of climate change—a powerful new argument, tied to the more fundamental outcry for justice and dignity.

NGOs would not have such influence in Bangladeshi villages without the country's moderate, syncretic form of Islam. Islam did not arrive in Bengal until the end of the 12th century, when Muslim invaders brought it from the northwest. It is but one element of Bangladesh's rich, heavily Hindu-ized cultural stew. In Muslim Bengali villages, *matbors* (village leaders) can be weaker than the sheikhs in Arab villages. And below these figureheads, women—whose committee mentality has been both receptive to and empowered by Westernized relief workers—can play a great role.

But this low-calorie version of Islam is giving way to a stark and assertive Wahhabist strain. A poor country that can't say no to money, with an unregulated, shattered coast of islands and inlets, Bangladesh has become a perfect setup for al-Qaeda affiliates, which, like Westernized NGOs, are filling needs unmet by a weak central government. Islamist orphanages, madrasas, and cyclone shelters are mushrooming throughout the country, thanks in part to donations from Saudi Arabia as well as from Bangladeshi workers returning home from the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula.

A decade ago, women in Dhaka and in the port city of Chittagong wore jeans and T-shirts, but more and more they cloak themselves in burkas. Madrasas now outnumber secondary schools, according to Anupam Sen, the vice chancellor of a new private university in Chittagong, who also told me that a new class of society is emerging that is "globally Islamic" rather than "specifically Bengali."

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Here is how global warming indirectly feeds Islamic extremism. As rural Bangladeshis flee a countryside ravaged by salinity in the south and drought in the northwest, they are migrating to cities at a rate of 3 to 4 percent a year. Swept into the vast anonymity of sprawling slum encampments, they lose their local and extended-family links, becoming more susceptible to a form of Islam with a sharper ideological edge. "We will not have anarchy at the village level, where society is healthy," warns Atiq Rahman. "But we can have it in the ever-enlarging urban areas." Such is the weakness of central authority in Bangladesh following 15 years of elected governments.

Bangladesh perfectly illustrates the perils of democracy in the developing world. That is because it is not a spectacular failure like Iraq, but one typical of those developing countries that officially subscribe to democracy and pay lip service to liberalism: here, civil-society intellectuals play almost no role in the political process, the army is trusted more than any of the political parties, and everybody—at least everybody I met—dreads elections, which they fear will lead to gang violence. "We have the best constitution, the best laws, but no one obeys them," lamented one businessman. "The best form of government for a country like ours," he went on, "is a military regime in its first year of power. After that, the military fails, too."

The military has become the power behind a caretaker civilian government since the autumn of 2006, when the political system appeared on the brink of chaos, with strikes, demonstrations, a spate of killings, and a stagnant economy. The ruling Bangladesh National Party was in the process of fixing the upcoming election, and the opposition Awami League was planning a series of attacks by armed gangs in return. Up to that point, elections had essentially been contests between these two feudal dynasties: the Awami League, headed by Sheikh Hasina Wazed, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, one of Bangladesh's founding fathers who was assassinated in a military coup in 1975; and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, headed by Khaleda Zia, the widow of another of the country's founders, General Ziaur Rahman, who was assassinated in another coup in 1981. The animosity between the two women harks back to their feud over whose family played a greater role in the country's independence struggle, as well as to the pardon Zia's late husband gave to the killers of Hasina Wazed's father.

Because each party is too weak to rule on its own, each has sought alliances with various Islamic groups and turned a blind eye to al-Qaeda affiliates such as Jemaah Islamiyah, which has reportedly used Bangladesh as a transit point and training base. Last March, when the military-backed caretaker government hanged six militants from the Jama'atul-Mujahideen—another local Islamist group responsible for hundreds of terrorist attacks from 2003 through 2005—the conventional wisdom had it that neither party could have carried out the sentence, compromised as each was by its Islamist coalition partners. In the eerie calm of the present moment, with the country more orderly than it has been in years—with no terrorist attacks, no strikes at the ports, army checkpoints everywhere, hundreds of politicians arrested on charges of corruption, and technocrats getting promoted over party hacks—nobody I met wanted a return to the old two-party system, even though no one wanted the military to continue playing such an overt role in the nation's affairs.

For now, the fear that radical Islam will take advantage of a political void keeps the military from returning to the barracks. "But in the long run, we are hostages to democracy," Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury, a former mayor of Chittagong, told me. "Your Westminster–Capitol Hill system won't work here. But we're poor and need aid, and so are required to hold elections." Democracy works in India, Chowdhury explained, because there are so many states and cities where different political parties dominate, so that state and municipal governments thrive alongside the federal one in a multitiered system. But in Bangladesh, the central government finds it hard to risk an opposition party's gaining control of one of the two big cities or some of the smaller ones; all power is hoarded in Dhaka. The result is a gap that village committees have filled at the bottom level of government, and NGOs and Islamists are vying to fill in the vast and crucial middle ground.

Barisal, a major river port in southern Bangladesh, offers a case study of the costs of that vacuum: a middle-sized city that reeks of garbage and raw sewage, because treatment plants are inadequate and canals have dried up, and because unauthorized high-rises have brought ever more people into the urban core. Ahmed Kaisea, the district environmental director, was another official who told me, "The laws are just fine. There is just no enforcement." I had walked in on him without an appointment. He did not seem busy. His phone never rang, and there was no evidence of a computer. With electricity cuts throughout the day, use of the Internet is severely limited in Barisal, as in other Bangladeshi cities. He was like many a bureaucrat I encountered, with a spacious office but little effective power. And as his city sprawls around him, its growth driven in large part by rural migrants escaping the flood-ravaged countryside, his job becomes harder still.

For the many rural newcomers to Bangladesh's cities, there is the rickshaw economy, as much an animating force in urban areas as the search for usable soil is in villages. Dhaka alone, a city of more than 10 million people, has several hundred thousand bicycle rickshaws.

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A rickshaw driver generally pays a rickshaw *mustan* (a mafia-style gang, often associated with a political party) the equivalent of $1.35 a day to rent the rickshaw. He collects 30 cents from an average passenger and ends up making around a dollar a day in profit. His wife may earn a similar amount breaking bricks into road material, while their children sift through garbage. In a country where 70 percent of the people subsist on less than $2 per day, such is the lot of a typical Bangladeshi family. This economic environment is perfect for the growth of radical Islam, which offers answers and spiritual rewards for suffering that a conviction in voting periodically cannot match. The surprise is not how radical Bangladesh (and much of the developing world) is, but how moderate it remains.

The social cohesion that does exist on the national level is the result of linguistic nationalism, not democracy. Unlike Pakistan or Iraq, this is an ethnically homogeneous country, and Islam is not the glue that holds together disparate groups. Moreover, national identity has been built on a shared history of violent struggle. In 1947, Muslim Bengalis rose up against the British and against India to form East Pakistan. Next came the 1971 liberation war against Muslim West Pakistan, which led to widespread rape and executions committed in Dhaka by a West Pakistani military hell-bent on imposing its Urdu language on the Bengalis. From East Pakistan—the "Land of the [Muslim] Pure"—the country became Bangladesh, the "Land of the Bengals." Language had replaced religion as the society's organizing principle.

But that principle is not inviolable. India, because it occupies most of the subcontinent—between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean—enjoys a demonstrable geographic logic; not so Bangladesh. Yet as small as Bangladesh is, it is vast in its own right. "Whoever comes to power in Dhaka—democratic, military—neglects us in Chittagong," Emdadul Islam, a local lawyer, complained to me, voicing a sentiment common in the southeastern port city. "We have our own Chittagongian dialect—a mixture of Portuguese, Arakanese, Burmese, Bengali, and so on. Historically, we are as linked to parts of Burma and India as we are to the rest of Bangladesh. Who knows what will happen when Burma one day opens up and we have new road and rail links with India and southwestern China? Give me my fundamental rights and dignity, and I'll love this soil. If not, I don't know." He was not calling for secession. But he was indicating how this artificial blotch of territory on the Indian subcontinent—called in turn Bengal, East Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh—could metamorphose yet again, amid the gale forces of regional politics, religious extremism, and nature itself.

India and China are nervously watching Bangladesh, for it holds the key to the reestablishment of a long-dormant historical trade route between the two rising behemoths of the 21st century. This route, as the Chittagong lawyer indicated, would pass through Burma and eastern India, before traversing Bangladesh on the way to Kolkata, helping to give China's landlocked southwest its long-sought access to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Whether this happens may hinge on the relationship between the environment and politics in Dhaka. A stable Bangladesh is necessary for this trade route, even though the route may lead, in time, to a weakening of national identity.

Toward the end of my stay in Bangladesh, I was in a bus traveling north from Cox's Bazar in the southeast of the country, near the Indian and Burmese borders, to Chittagong, plowing through one recently formed swamp after another. It was only a week into the monsoon: there'd been no cyclone, no tropical storm, just normal heavy rains and mudslides that had killed more than 120 people in 48 hours. Along the sides of the raised road on which the bus traveled, the tea-colored water reached up to the bottom of corrugated-iron roofs. In other places, men gripped their lungis in waist-deep water. Whole trees were being swept downstream as rivers flowed only a foot or two under bridges. On these bridges, hordes of young men had gathered with ropes, fishing for firewood as it passed beneath. High mounds of wood were piled up, waiting to dry. Even heavier rains would come in July and August.

Society coped as well as it could, often ingeniously. A cascade of cell-phone text messages told of danger ahead. Signal flags had been set up on beaches to forewarn of incoming water. Disaster supplies had been pre-positioned in places as part of an increasingly sophisticated early-warning system. The Bangladeshi army and navy were available in case of major catastrophe. Otherwise, in many ways, it was up to the villages and the NGOs to deal with the natural world.

Bangladesh demonstrates how developing-world misery has acquired—in the form of climate change—a powerful new argument, tied to the more fundamental outcry for justice and dignity.

Robert D. Kaplan, an *Atlantic* national correspondent, is the Class of 1960 Distinguished Visiting Professor in National Security at the U.S. Naval Academy. His latest book is *Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts: The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground*.

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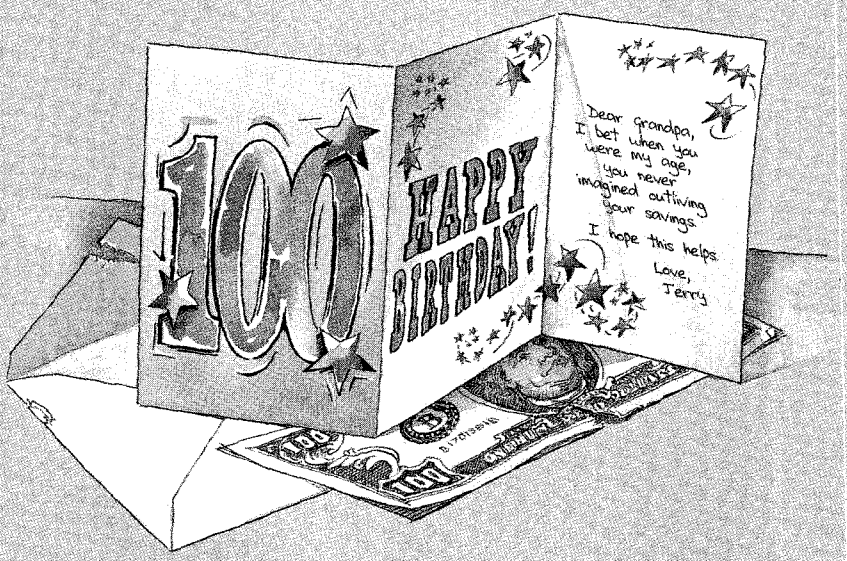
How long of a retirement *should you plan for?*

CONSIDER THIS: HALLMARK SOLD 85,000 "HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY!" CARDS LAST YEAR.



Thanks to modern medicine and healthier lifestyles, **Americans are living longer than ever. The average 65-year-old woman can expect to live until 87, and the average 65-year-old man to 84.** So it's easy to understand why workers today should plan for a 30-year retirement.

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2. BOOST RETIREMENT PLAN ENROLLMENT.
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Let's save retirement by saving for retirement.
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THE ATLANTIC'S

STATE *of the* UNION

AFTER IRAQ

"As America approaches the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the list of the war's unintended consequences is without end." So writes Jeffrey Goldberg in his cover article, "After Iraq." While Goldberg's story describes the consequences for the Middle East, the effects of the Iraq War have been powerfully felt in other ways—in our politics and our finances, of course, but also in the crowding of other stories off our front pages, if not out of our consciousness.

The title of Goldberg's piece sets the theme of *The Atlantic*'s State of the Union package for 2008. What, after Iraq, are the problems most urgently confronting us? What, besides Iraq, should we focus on now, with the presidential election just 11 months away? The crisis in public education; the imminent retirement of the Baby Boomers; the clichés undermining black-white relations; and the erosion of American values and reputation by the detentions at Guantánamo Bay: in this special section, Matt Miller, Megan McArdle, Amy Waldman, and Andrew Sullivan tackle these subjects and, in sum, the question of who we are—after Iraq—as a nation.

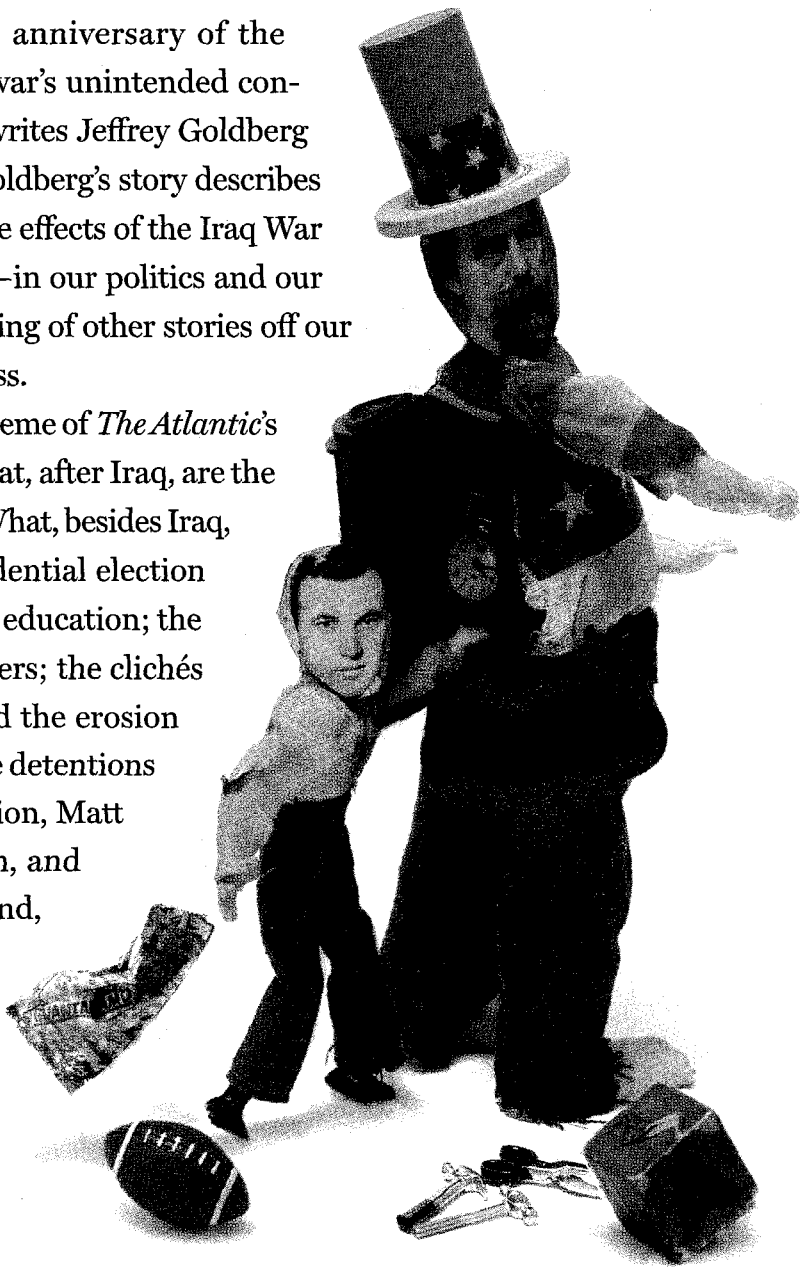

Illustration by Polly Becker

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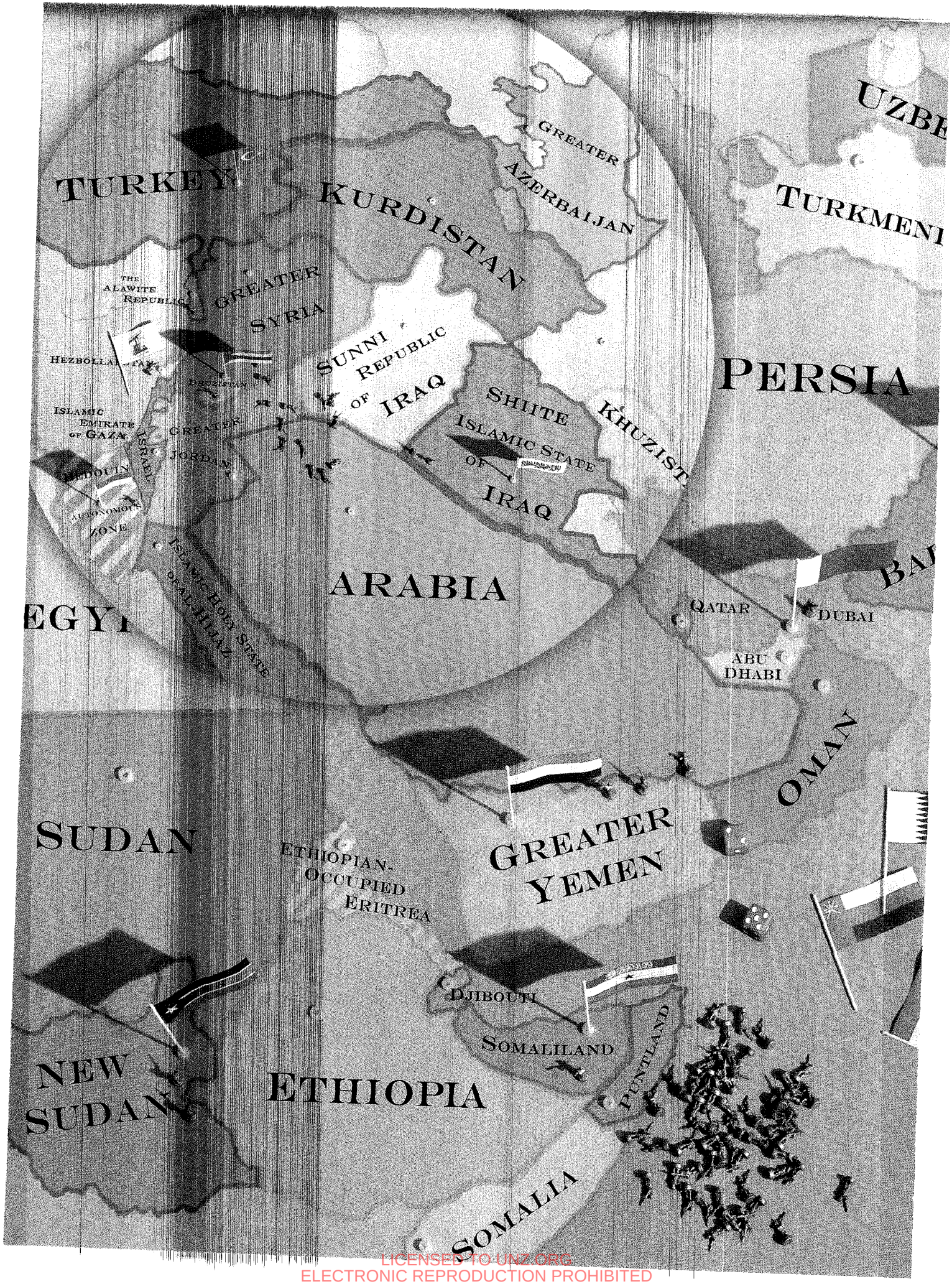

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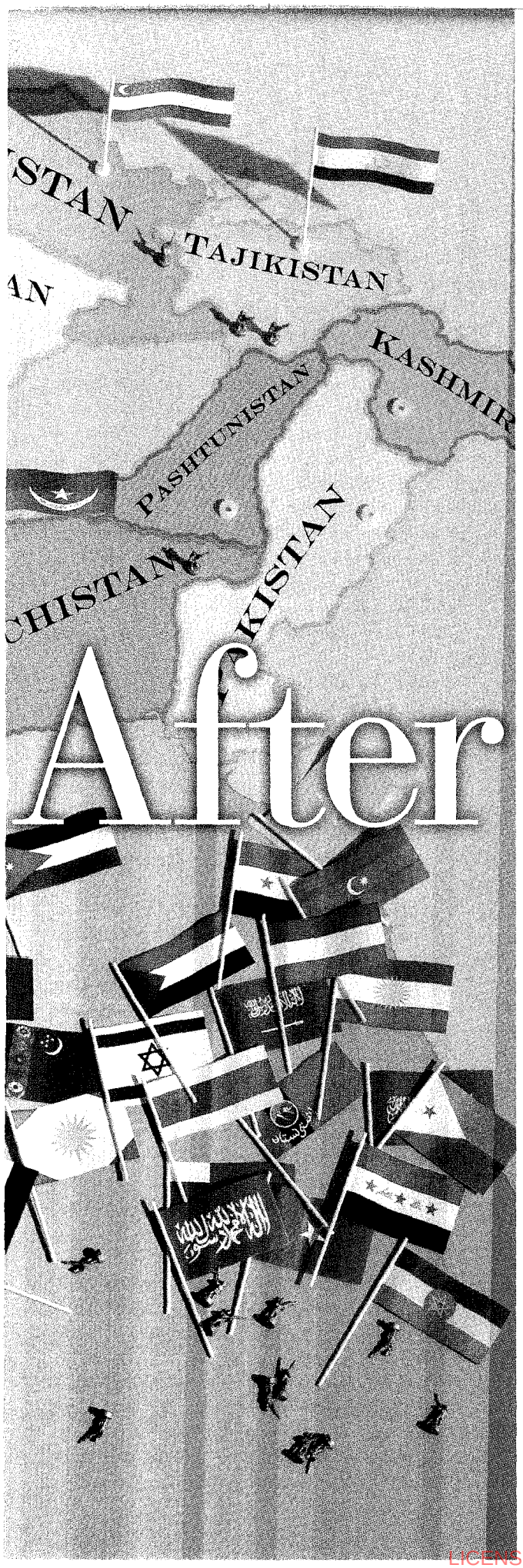

A report from the new Middle East—and a glimpse of its possible future

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

Photoillustration by Holly Lindem

IRAQ

Not long ago, in a decrepit prison in Iraqi Kurdistan, a senior interrogator with the Kurdish intelligence service decided, for my entertainment and edification, to introduce me to an al-Qaeda terrorist named Omar. "This one is crazy," the interrogator said. "Don't get close, or he'll bite you." ¶ Omar was a Sunni Arab from a village outside Mosul; he was a short and weedy man, roughly 30 years old, who radiated a pure animal anger. He was also a relentless jabberer; he did not shut up »

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from the moment we were introduced. I met him in an unventilated interrogation room that smelled of bleach and paint. He was handcuffed, and he cursed steadily, making appalling accusations about the sexual practices of the interrogator's mother. He cursed the Kurds, in general, as pig-eaters, blasphemers, and American

lackeys. As Omar ranted, the interrogator smiled. "I told you the Arabs don't like the Kurds," he said. I've known the interrogator for a while, and this is his perpetual theme: close proximity to Arabs has sabotaged Kurdish happiness.

Omar, the Kurds claim, was once an inconsequential deputy to the now-deceased terrorist chieftain Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Omar disputed this characterization. By his own telling, he accomplished prodigies of terror against the pro-American Kurdish forces in the northern provinces of Iraq. "You are worse than the Americans," he told his Kurdish interrogator. "You are the enemy of the Muslim nation. You are enemies of God." The interrogator—I will not name him here, for reasons that will become apparent in a moment—sat sturdily opposite Omar, absorbing his invective for several minutes, absentmindedly paging through a copy of the Koran.

During a break in the tirade, the interrogator asked Omar, for my benefit, to rehearse his biography. Omar's life was undistinguished. His father was a one-donkey farmer; Omar was educated in Saddam's school system, which is to say he was hardly educated; he joined the army, and then Ansar al-Islam, the al-Qaeda–affiliated terrorist group that operates along the Iranian frontier. And then, on the blackest of days, as he described it, he fell prisoner to the Kurds.

The interrogator asked me if I had any questions for Omar. Yes, I said: Have you been tortured in this prison?

"No," he said.

"What would you do if you were to be released from prison right now?"

"I would get a knife and cut your head off," he said.

At this, the interrogator smacked Omar across the face with the Koran.

Omar yelped in shock. The interrogator said: "Don't talk that way to a guest!"

Now, Omar rounded the bend. A bolus of spit flew from his mouth as he screamed. The interrogator taunted Omar further. "This book of yours," he said, waving the Koran. "'Cut off their heads! Cut off their heads!' That's the answer for everything!" Omar cursed the interrogator's mother once again; the interrogator trumped him by cursing the Prophet Muhammad's mother.

The meeting was then adjourned.

In the hallway, I asked the interrogator, "Aren't you Muslim?"

"Of course," he said.

"But you're not a big believer in the Koran?"

"The Koran's OK," he said. "I don't have any criticism of Muhammad's mother. I just say that to get him mad."

He went on, "The Koran wasn't written by God, you know. It was written by Arabs. The Arabs were imperialists, and they forced it on us." This is a common belief among negligibly religious Kurds, of whom there are many millions.

"That's your problem, then," I said. "Arabs."

"Of course," he replied. "The Arabs are responsible for all our misfortunes."

"What about the Turks?" I asked. It is the Turks, after all, who are incessantly threatening to invade Iraqi Kurdistan, which they decline to call "Iraqi Kurdistan," in more or less the same obstreperous manner that they refuse to call the Armenian genocide a genocide.

"The Turks, too," he said. "Everyone who denies us our right to be free is responsible for our misfortunes."

We stepped out into the sun. "The Kurds never had friends. Now we have the most important friend, America. We're closer to freeing ourselves from the Arabs than ever," he said.

To the Kurds, the Arabs are bearers of great misfortune. The decades-long oppression of Iraq's Kurds culminated during the rule of Saddam Hussein, whose Sunni Arab–dominated army committed genocide against them in the late 1980s. Yet their unfaltering faith that they will one day be free may soon be rewarded: the Kurds are finally edging close to independence. Much blood may be spilled as Kurdistan unhitches itself from Iraq—Turkey is famously sour on the idea of Kurdish

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independence, fearing a riptide of nationalist feeling among its own unhappy Kurds—but independence for Iraq's Kurds seems, if not immediate, then in due course inevitable.

In many ways, the Kurds are functionally independent already. The Kurdish regional government has its own army, collects its own taxes, and negotiates its own oil deals. For the moment, Kurdish officials say they would be satisfied with membership in a loose-jointed federation with the Shiite and Sunni Arabs to their south. But in Erbil and Sulaymani, the two main cities of the Kurdish region, the Iraqi flag is banned from flying; Arabic is scarcely heard on the streets (and is never spoken by young people, who are happily ignorant of it), and Baghdad is referred to as a foreign capital. In October, when I was last in the region, I called the office of a high official of the *peshmerga*, the Kurdish guerrilla army, but was told that he had "gone to Iraq" for the week.

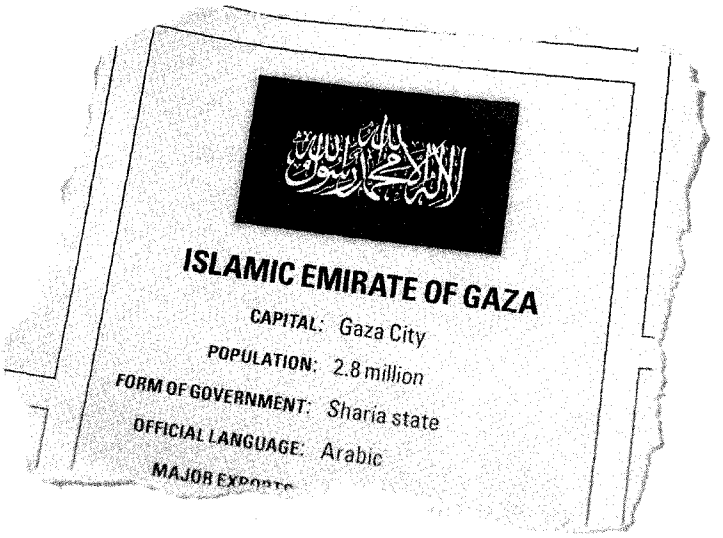
The Bush administration gave many reasons for the invasion of Iraq, but the satisfaction of Kurdish national desire was not one of them. Quite the opposite: the goal was, and remains, a unified, democratic Iraq. In fact, key officials of the administration have a history of indifference to, and ignorance of, the subject of Kurdish nationalism. At a conference in 2004, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stated, "What has been impressive to me so far is that Iraqis—whether Kurds or Shia or Sunni or the many other ethnic groups in Iraq—have demonstrated that they really want to live as one in a unified Iraq." As Peter Galbraith, a former American diplomat and an advocate for Kurdish independence, has observed, Rice's statement was disconnected from observable reality—shortly before she spoke, 80 percent of all Iraqi Kurdish adults had signed a petition calling for a vote on independence.

Nor were neoconservative ideologues—who had the most-elaborate visions of a liberal, democratic Iraq—interested in the Kurdish cause, or even particularly knowledgeable about its history. Just before the "Mission Accomplished" phase of the war, I spoke about Kurdistan to an audience that included Norman Podhoretz, the vicariously martial neoconservative who is now a Middle East adviser to Rudolph Giuliani. After the event, Podhoretz seemed authentically bewildered. "What's a Kurd, anyway?" he asked me.

As America approaches the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the list of the war's unintended consequences is without end (as opposed to the list of intended consequences, which is, so far, vanishingly brief). The list includes, notably, the likelihood that the Kurds will achieve their independence and that Iraq will go the way of Gaul and be divided into three parts—but it also includes much more than that. Across the Middle East, and into south-central Asia, the intrinsically artificial qualities of several states have been brought into focus by the omnivorous American response to the attacks of 9/11; it is not just Iraq and Afghanistan that appear to be incoherent amalgamations of disparate tribes and territories. The precariousness of such states as Lebanon and Pakistan, of course, predates the invasion of Iraq. But the wars against al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and especially Saddam Hussein have made the durability of the modern Middle East state system an open question in ways that it wasn't a mere seven years ago.

It used to be that the most far-reaching and inventive question one could ask about the Middle East was this: How many states, one or two—Israel or a Palestinian state, or both—will one day exist on the slip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River?

Today, that question seems trivial when compared with this one: How many states will there one day be between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates River? Three? Four? Five? Six? And why stop at the western bank of the Euphrates? Why not go all the way to the Indus River? Between the Mediterranean and the Indus



today lie Israel and the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Long-term instability could lead to the breakup of many of these states.

All states are man-made. But some are more man-made than others. It was Winston Churchill (a bust of whom Bush keeps in the Oval Office) who, in the aftermath of World War I, roped together three provinces of the defeated and dissolved Ottoman Empire, adopted the name Iraq, and bequeathed it to a luckless branch of the Hashemite tribe of west Arabia. Churchill would eventually call the forced inclusion of the Kurds in Iraq one of

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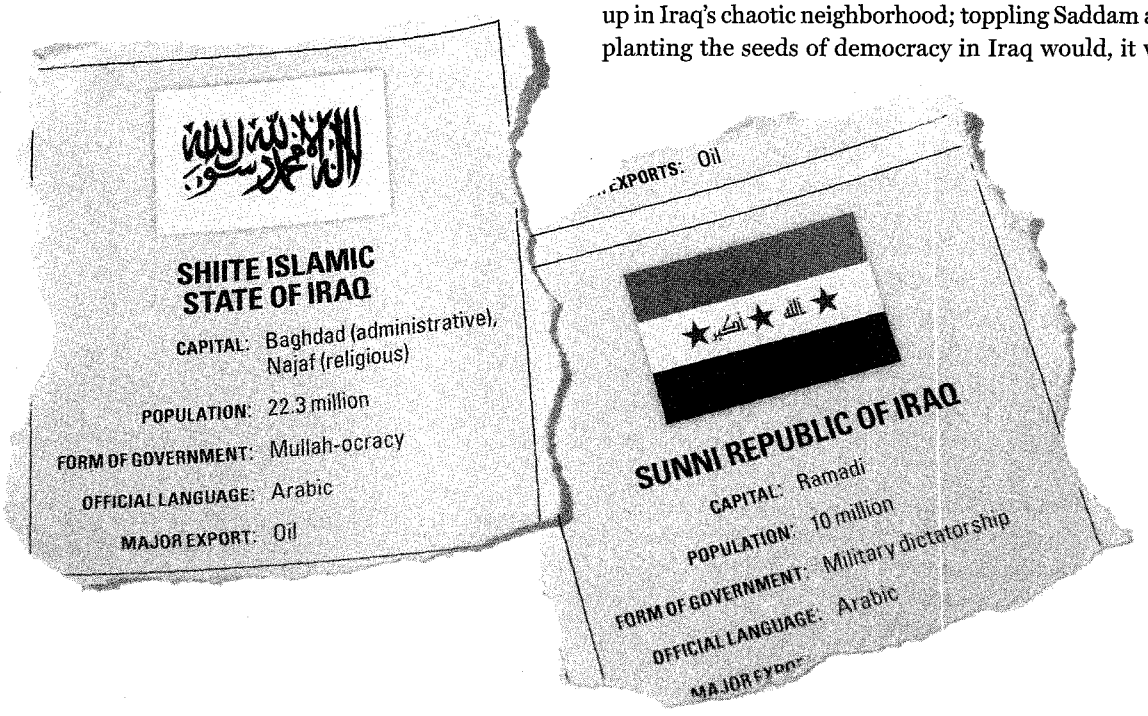
his worst mistakes—but by then, there was nothing he could do about it.

The British, together with the French, gave the world the modern Middle East. In addition to manufacturing the country now called Iraq, the grand Middle East settlement shrank Turkey by the middle of the 1920s to the size of the Anatolian peninsula; granted what are now Syria and Lebanon to the French; and kept Egypt under British control. The British also broke Palestine in two, calling its eastern portion Trans-Jordan and installing a Hashemite prince, Abdullah, as its ruler, and at the same time promising Western Palestine to the Jews, while implying to the Arabs there that it was their land, too. As the historian David Fromkin puts it in *A Peace to End All Peace*, his definitive account of the machinations among the Great Powers that resulted in the modern map of the Middle East, the region

> became what it is today both because the European powers undertook to re-shape it and because Britain and France failed to ensure that the dynasties, the states, and the political system that they established would permanently endure.

Of course, the current turbulence in the Middle East is attributable also to factors beyond the miscalculations of both the hubristic, seat-of-the-pants Bush administration and the hubristic, seat-of-the-pants French and British empires. Among other things, there is the crisis within Islam, a religion whose doctrinal triumphalism—Muslims believe the Koran to be the final, authoritative word of God—is undermined daily by the global balance of power, with predictable and terrible consequences (see: the life of Mohammed Atta et al.); and there is the related and continuing crisis of globalization, which drives people who have not yet received the message that the world is now flat to find solace and meaning in their fundamental ethnic and religious identities.

But since 9/11, America's interventions in the region—and especially in Iraq—have exacerbated the tensions there, and have laid bare how artificial, and how tenuously constructed, the current map of the Middle East really is. By invading Iraq, the Bush administration sought not only to deprive the country of its putative weapons of mass destruction, but also to shake things up in Iraq's chaotic neighborhood; toppling Saddam and planting the seeds of democracy in Iraq would, it was hoped, make possible the transformation of the region. The region *is* being transformed; that transformation is just turning out to be a different, and possibly far broader, one than imagined. As Dennis Ross, who was a Middle East envoy for both Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush, and is now with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, puts it, the Iraq War has begun to produce "wholesale change"—but "it won't be the one envisioned by the administration." An independent Kurdistan would be just the start.



Envisioning what the Middle East might look like five or 10 or 50 years from now is by definition a speculative exercise. But precisely because of the scope of the transformation that's under way, imagining the future of the region, and figuring out a smart approach to it, should be

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at the top of America's post-Iraq priorities. At the moment, however, neither the Bush administration nor the candidates for the presidency seem to be thinking about the future of the Middle East (beyond the immediate situation in Iraq and the specific question of what to do about Iran's nuclear intentions) in any particularly creative way. At the State Department and on the National Security Council, there is a poverty of imagination (to borrow a phrase from the debate about the causes of chronic intelligence failure) about the shifting map of the region.

It's not just the fragility of the post-1922 borders that has been exposed by recent history; it's also the limitations of the leading foreign-policy philosophies—realism and neoconservatism. Formulating a foreign policy after Iraq will require coming to terms with a reshaped Middle East, and thinking about it in new ways.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

In an effort to understand the shape of things to come in the Middle East, I spent several weeks speaking with more than 25 experts and traveling to Iraq, Jordan, the West Bank, and Israel. Many of the conversations were colored, naturally, by the ideological predispositions of those I talked with. The realists quake at instability, which threatens (as they see it) the only real American interest in the Middle East, the uninterrupted flow of Arab oil. Iranophobes see that country's empowerment, and the threat of regional Shiite-Sunni warfare, as the greatest cause for worry. Pro-Palestinian academics blame Israel, and its friends in Washington, for trying to force the collapse of the Arab state system. The liberal interventionists lament the poor execution of the Iraq War, and wish that the Bush administration had gone about exporting democracy to the Middle East with more subtlety and less hypocrisy. The neoconservatives, who cite the American Revolution as an example of what might be called "constructive volatility," see no reason to regret instability (even as they concede that it's hard to imagine a happy end to the Iraq War anytime soon).

Some experts didn't want to play at all. When I called David Fromkin and asked him to speculate about the future of the Middle East, he said morosely, "The Middle East has no future." And when I spoke to Edward Luttwak, the iconoclastic military historian at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, he said there was no reason to engage the subject: the West is unable to shape the future of the Middle East, so why bother? "The United States could abandon Israel altogether, or embrace the general Arab cause 100 percent," he said, but "the Arabs will find a new reason to be anti-American."

Many experts I spoke to ventured that it would be foolish to predict what will happen in the Middle East next Tuesday, let alone in 2018, or in 2028—but that it would also be foolish not to be actively thinking about, and preparing for, what might come next.

So what might, in fact, come next? The most important first-order consequence of the Iraq invasion, envisioned by many of those I spoke to, is the possibility of a regional conflict between Sunnis and Shiites for theological and political supremacy in the Middle East. This is a war that could be fought by proxies of Saudi Arabia, the Sunni flag-bearer, against Iran—or perhaps by Iran and Saudi Arabia themselves—on battlefields across Iraq, in Lebanon and Syria, and in Saudi Arabia's largely Shiite Eastern Province, under which most of the kingdom's oil lies. In 2004, King Abdullah II of Jordan, a Sunni, spoke of the creation of a Shiite "crescent," running from Iran, through Iraq, and into Syria and Lebanon, that would destabilize the Arab world. Jordan, which is an indispensably important American ally, is a Sunni country, but its population is also majority-Palestinian, and many of those Palestinians support the Islamist Hamas movement, one of whose main sponsors is Shiite Iran.

The list of the Iraq War's unintended consequences is without end and includes, notably, the likelihood of Kurdish independence and the division of Iraq into three parts.

There are likely second-order consequences, as well. Rampant Kurdish nationalism, unleashed by the invasion, may spill over into the Kurdish areas of Turkey and Iran. America's reliance on anti-democratic regimes, such as Egypt's, for help in its campaign against Islamist terrorism could strengthen the Islamist opposition in those countries. An American decision to confront Iran could have an enduring impact on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process—a tenuous undertaking to begin with—because the chief enemies of compromise are the Iranian-backed terror groups Hamas and Hezbollah.

Then there are third-order consequences: in the next 20 years, new states could emerge as old ones shrink, fracture, or disappear. Khuzestan, a mostly Arab province of majority-Persian Iran, could become independent. Lebanon, whose existence is perpetually inexplicable, could become partly absorbed by Syria, whose future is also uncertain. The Alawites who rule Syria are

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members of a Shiite splinter sect, and they are a tiny minority in their own, mostly Sunni country (the Alawites briefly ruled an independent state in the mountains above the Mediterranean). Syria, out of a population of 20 million, has roughly 2 million Kurds, who are mostly indifferent, and sometimes hostile, to the government in Damascus.

Kuwait is another state whose future looks unstable; after all, it has already been subsumed once, and could be again—though, under another scenario, it could gain territory and population, if Iraq's Sunnis seek an alliance with it as a way of protecting themselves from their country's newly powerful Shiites. Bahrain, a majority-Shiite country ruled by Sunnis, could well be annexed by Iran (which already claims it), and Yemen could expand its territory at Saudi Arabia's expense. And the next decades might see the birth of one or two Palestinian states—and, perhaps, the end of Israel as a Jewish state, a fervent dream of much of the Muslim world.

And let's not forget Pakistan, whose artificiality I was reminded of by Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistani dictator, during an interview in the garrison city of Rawalpindi some years ago. At one point, he took exception to the idea that the Baluch, the quasi-nomadic people who inhabit the large deserts of Pakistan's west (and Iran's southeast), might feel unattached to the government in Islamabad. In so doing, he undermined the idea of Pakistan as a naturally unitary state. "I know many residents of Baluchistan who are appreciative of Pakistan and the many programs and the like that Pakistan has for Baluchistan," he said, referring to one of his states as if it were another country. He continued: "Why [is Pakistan] thought of as artificial and not others? Didn't your country almost come to an end in a civil war? You faced larger problems than we ever have."

Musharraf also made passing reference to the Afghan-Pakistan border, the so-called Durand Line. It was named after the English official who in 1893 forced the Afghans to accept it as their border with British India, even though it sliced through the territory of a large ethnic group, the truculent Pashtuns, who dominate Afghan politics and warmaking and who have always disliked and, accordingly, disrespected the line. Musharraf warned about the hazards of even thinking about the line. "Why would there be such a desire to change existing situations?" he said. "There would be instability to come out of this situation, should this question be put on the table. It is best to leave borders alone. If you start asking about this and that border or this and that arrangement ..." He didn't finish the sentence.

All of this is very confusing, of course. Many Americans (including, until not so long ago, President Bush) do not know the difference between a Shiite and a Sunni, let alone between a Sindhi and a Punjabi. Just try to imagine, say, Secretary of State Podhoretz briefing President Giuliani on his first meeting with the leaders of the Baluchistan Liberation Army, and it becomes obvious that we may be entering a new and hazardous era.

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MAPPING THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

"Nobody is thinking about whether or not the map is still viable," Ralph Peters told me. Peters is a retired Army lieutenant colonel and intelligence expert who writes frequent critiques of U.S. strategy in the Middle East. "It's not a question about how America wants the map to look; it's a question of how the map is going to look, whether we like it or not."

In the June 2006 issue of *Armed Forces Journal*, Peters published a map of what he thought a more logical Middle East might look like. Rather than following the European-drawn borders, he made his map by tracing the region's "blood borders," invisible lines that would separate battling ethnic and sectarian groups. He wrote of his map,

> While the Middle East has far more problems than dysfunctional borders alone—from cultural stagnation through scandalous inequality to deadly religious extremism—the greatest taboo in striving to understand the region's comprehensive failure isn't Islam but the awful-but-sacrosanct international boundaries worshipped by our own diplomats.

Peters drew onto his map an independent Kurdistan and an abridged Turkey; he shrank Iran (handing over Khuzestan to an as-yet-imaginary Arab-Shiite state he carved out of what is now southern Iraq); he placed Jordan and Yemen on a steroid regimen; and he dismembered Saudi Arabia because he sees it as a primary enemy of Muslim modernization.

It was an act of knowing whimsy, he said. But it was seen by the Middle East's more fevered minds as a window onto the American imperial planning process. "The reaction was pure paranoia, just hysterics," Peters told me. "The Turks in particular got very upset." Peters explained how he made the map. "The art department gave me a blank map, and I took a crayon and drew on it. After it came out, people started arguing on the Internet that this border should, in fact, be 50 miles this way, and that border 50 miles that way, but the width of the crayon itself was 200 miles."

Given the preexisting sensitivities in the Middle East to white men wielding crayons, it's not surprising that his map would be met with such anxiety. There is a belief, prevalent in the Middle East and among pro-Palestinian American academics, that the Bush administration's actual goal—or the goal, at least, of its favored theoreticians—is to rip up the existing map of the Arab Middle East in order to help Israel.

"One of the most evil things that is happening is that a bunch of people who are fundamentally opposed to the existence of these nation-states have gotten into the control room," Rashid Khalidi, who is the Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, told me. "They are irresponsible and highly ideological neoconservatives, generally, and they have been trying to smash the Arab state system. Their basic philosophy is, the smaller the Arab state, the better."

Neoconservatives inside the administration deny this. "We never had the creation of new states as a goal," Douglas Feith, the former undersecretary of defense for policy, told me, and indeed, there is no proof that the administration sought the breakup of Iraq. On the contrary: shortly after the invasion, I saw Paul Wolfowitz, then the deputy secretary of defense, at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner, and I told him I had just returned from Kurdistan. Maybe he was just feeling snappish (a few minutes earlier he had had a confrontation with Al Franken that ended with Wolfowitz saying "Fuck you" to the comedian), but Wolfowitz looked at me and, as though he were channeling the Turkish foreign minister, said, "We call it northern Iraq. Northern *Iraq*."

Neoconservative ideologues never seemed much interested in, or knowledgeable about, the Kurdish cause. 'What's a Kurd, anyway?' Norman Podhoretz asked me a few years ago.

Peters said he noticed early on as well that the administration was committed to a unified Iraq, and to the preexisting, European-drawn map of the Middle East. "This is how strange things are—the greatest force for democracy in the world has signed up for the maintenance of the European model of the world," he said. "Even the neocons, who look like revolutionaries, just want to substitute Bourbons for Hapsburgs," he continued, and added, "Not just in Iraq." (Peters acknowledged that neoconservatives outside the administration were more radical than those on the inside, like Feith and Wolfowitz.)

So just what did the neoconservatives, the most influential foreign-policy school of the Bush years, have in mind? Feith, whose (inevitable) book on the invasion and its aftermath will be published in March, told me that the neoconservatives—at least those inside the administration—did not hope to create new borders, but did see a value in "instability," especially since, in his view, the Middle East was already destabilized by the presence of Saddam Hussein. "There is something I once heard attributed

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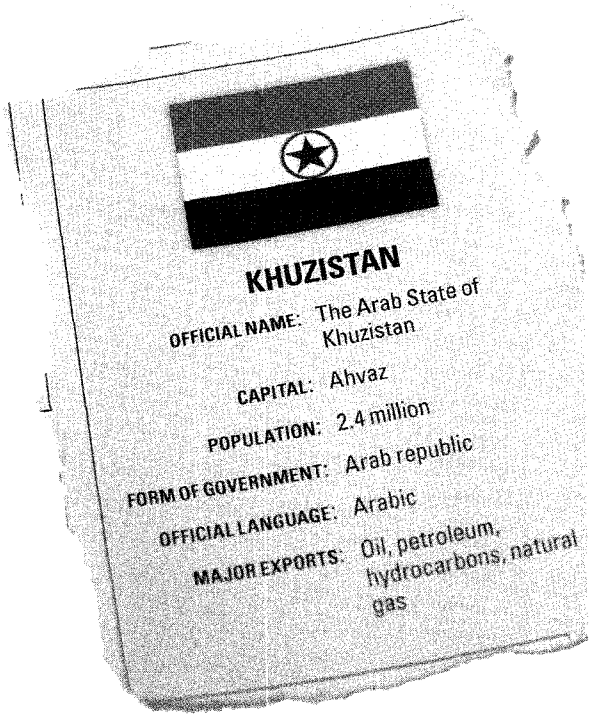
to Goethe," he said, "that 'Disorder is worse than injustice.' We have an interest in stability, of course, but we should not overemphasize the value of stability when there is an opportunity to make the world a better or safer place for us. For example, during the Nixon presidency, and the George H. W. Bush presidency, the emphasis was on stabilizing relations with the Soviet Union. During the Reagan administration, the goal was to put the Communists on the ash heap of history. Those Americans who argued for stability tried to preserve the Soviet Union. But it was Reagan who was right." Feith had hoped that the demise of Iraq's Baath regime would allow a new sort of governance to take hold in an Arab country. "We understood that if you did something as big as replacing Saddam, then there are going to be all kinds of consequences, many of which you can't possibly anticipate. Something good may come, something negative might come out."

So far, it's been mainly negative. The neoconservatives' big idea was that American-style democracy would quickly take hold in Iraq, spread through the Arab Middle East, and then be followed by the collapse of al-Qaeda, who would no longer have American-backed authoritarian Arab regimes to rally against. But democracy has turned out to be a habit not easily cultivated, and the idea that Arab political culture is capable of absorbing democratic notions of governance has fallen into disfavor.

In December of 2006, I went to the Israeli Embassy in Washington for a ceremony honoring Natan Sharansky, who had just received the Medal of Freedom from



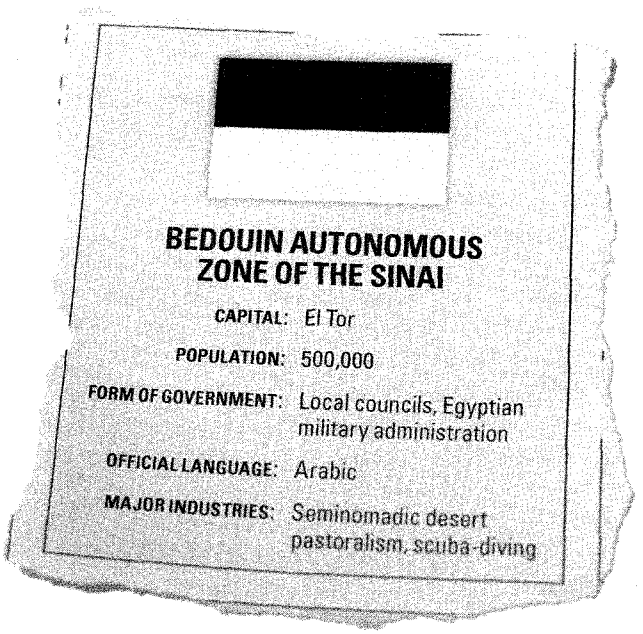
President Bush. Sharansky, the former Soviet dissident, had become the president's tutor on the importance of democratic reform in the Arab world, and during the ceremony, he praised the president for pursuing unpopular policies. As he talked, the man next to me, a senior Israeli security official, whispered, "What a child."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It's not smart ... He wants Jordan to be more democratic. Do you know what that would mean for Israel and America? If you were me, would you rather have a stable monarch who is secular and who has a good intelligence service on your eastern border, or would you rather have a state run by Hamas? That's what he would get if there were no more monarchy in Jordan."

After the ceremony, I spoke with Sharansky about this critique. He acknowledged that he is virtually the lone neoconservative thinker in Israel, and one of the few who still believes that democracy is exportable to the Arab world, by force or otherwise.

"After I came back from Washington once," he said, "I saw [Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon in the Knesset, and he said, 'Mazel tov, Natan. You've convinced President Bush of something that doesn't exist.'"



A WAR ABOUT NOTHING?

It is true that the neoconservatives' dream of Middle East democracy has proved to be a mirage. But it's not as though the neocons' principal foils, the foreign-policy realists, who view stability as a paramount virtue, have

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covered themselves in glory in the post-9/11 era. Brent Scowcroft, President George H. W. Bush's national security adviser and Washington's senior advocate of foreign-policy realism, told me not long ago of a conversation he had had with his onetime protégée Condoleezza Rice. "She says, 'We're going to democratize Iraq,' and I said, 'Condi, you're not going to democratize Iraq,' and she said, 'You know, you're just stuck in the old days,' and she comes back to this thing, that we've tolerated an autocratic Middle East for 50 years, and so on and so forth. But we've had 50 years of peace." Of course, what Scowcroft fails to note here is that al-Qaeda attacked us in part because America is the prime backer of its enemies, the autocratic rulers of Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

It is conceivable, if paradoxical, that the actual outcome of the recent turmoil in the Middle East could be a new era of stability, fostered by realists in this country and in the region itself. This might be the most unlikely potential outcome of the Iraq invasion—that it turns out to be the Seinfeld War, a war about nothing (except, of course, the loss of a great many lives and vast sums of money). Everything changes if America attacks Iranian nuclear sites, of course—but the latest National Intelligence Estimate, which came out in early December and reported that Iran had shut down its covert nuclear-weapons program in 2003, makes it unlikely that the Bush administration will pursue this option. And the next one or two U.S. presidents, who will be inheriting both the Iraq and Afghanistan portfolios, will probably be hesitant to attack any more Muslim countries. It's not impossible to imagine that, in 20 years, the map of the Middle East will look exactly like it does today.

The Middle East state system has become an open question:
Israel and the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and others could all ultimately break apart.

"We tend to underestimate the power of states," Robert Satloff, the director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told me. "The PC way of looking at the 21st century is that non-state actors—al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, general chaos—have replaced states as the key players in the Middle East. But states are more resilient than that." He added that a newfound fear of instability might even buttress existing states.

Jordan is an interesting example of this phenomenon. While it would seem eminently vulnerable to the chaos—Iraq is to its east, the Palestinians and Israel to its west, and Syria to the north—Jordan is, in fact, almost tranquil, in part because it is led by a savvy king (scion of a family, the Hashemites, who are quite used to living on the balls of their feet) and in part because most of its people, having viewed from orchestra seats the bedlam in Iraq, want quiet, even if that means forgoing all the features of Western democracy.

Jordan might be an exception, however. Even a passing look at a country like Saudi Arabia suggests that internally driven regime changes are real possibilities. In Egypt the aging Hosni Mubarak is trying to engineer his unproven younger son, Gamal, into the presidency. It does not seem likely, at the moment, that Gamal would succeed in the job. Egypt was once a country that could project its power into Syria; now its leaders are having trouble controlling the Sinai Peninsula, home to a couple hundred thousand Bedouin, who are Pashtun-like in their stiff-neckedness and who seem more and more unwilling to accept Cairo's rule. America, of course, continues to embrace Mubarak, seeing no alternative except the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. This pattern is familiar in American diplomacy; President Bush's long embrace of Musharraf comes to mind, and there are various, bipartisan antecedents—such as, most notably, Jimmy Carter's support for the Shah of Iran.

BEYOND REALISM AND NEOCONSERVATISM

In the years since his Iraq project fell into disrepair, President Bush has acted like a realist while speaking like a utopian neoconservative. He has touted the virtues of democracy to the very people subjugated by pro-American dictators. This is probably not a good long-term policy for managing chaos in the Middle East.

The problem is that Iraq has already proven—and Iran continues to prove—that Americans cannot make Middle Easterners do what is in America's best interest. "Whether the Middle East is unimportant or terrifically important, when it comes to doing anything about it, the actions undertaken are all ineffectual or counterproductive," Edward Luttwak told me. "In the Middle East, it doesn't help to be nice to them, or to bomb them."

A first step in restoring America's influence in the Middle East is to accept with humility the notion that America—like Britain before it—cannot organize the region according to its own interests. (Ideologues of varying positions tend to quote for their own benefit the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr on the proper use of American power—but perhaps what the debate needs is a version of Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the courage

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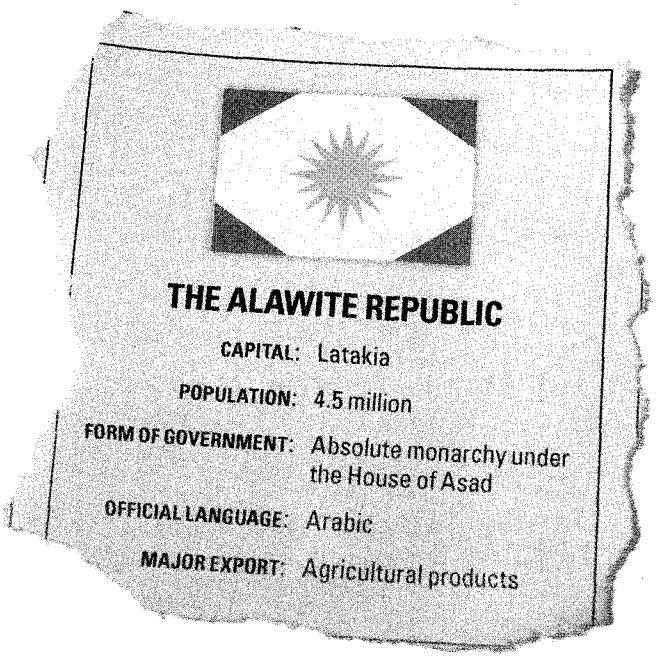
to change the regimes I can, the grace to accept the regimes I can't ...") What's called for is a foreign policy in which the neoconservative's belief in the liberating power of democracy is yoked to the realist's understanding of unintended consequences.

Of course, winning in Iraq—or at least not losing—would help fortify America's deterrent power, and check Iran's involvement in Lebanon, Gaza, and elsewhere.



America's situation in Iraq is not quite so dire as it was a year ago; the troop surge has worked to suppress much violence, and there have been tentative steps by both Shiite and Sunni leaders to prevent all-out sectarian war. To be sure, very few experts predict with any assurance an optimistic future for Iraq. "Ten years is a reasonable time period to think that the sectarian conflict will need to play out," Martin Indyk, the director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, told me. "The parties will eventually exhaust themselves. Perhaps they have already, although I fear that the surge has just provided a break for Sunnis and Shias to better position themselves for further conflict when American forces are drawn down. There's no indication yet that the Shias are prepared to share power or that the Sunnis are prepared to live as a minority under Shia majoritarian rule."

Erstwhile optimists about the prospects for democracy in the Middle East, myself included, have been chastened by recent events. But the U.S. would do well not to abandon the long-term hope that democracy, exported carefully, and slowly, can change reality. This would be not a five-year project, but a 50-year one. It would focus on aiding Middle Eastern journalists and democracy activists, on building strong universities and independent judiciaries—and on being discerning enough *not* to aid Muslim democracy activists when American help would undermine their credibility. If Arab moderates and democrats "begin this work now, in 10 or 15 years we will have a horse in this race," said Omran Salman, the head of an Arab reform organization called Aafaq. "We've sacrificed democracy for stability, but it's a fabricated stability. When someone's sitting on your head, it's not stable." Salman, a Shiite from Bahrain, said he opposes Western military intervention in certain cases, preferring American "moral intervention." The Americans "have to keep pressure on regimes to force them to make reforms and open their societies. Now what the regimes do is oppress liberals."

One problem is that American moral capital has been depleted, which only underscores the practical importance to national security of, among other things, banning torture, and considering carefully the impact an American strike on Iran would have on the typical Iranian. After 30 years of oppressive fundamentalist Muslim rule, many of Iran's people are pro-American; that could change, however, if American bombs begin to fall on their country.

THE NEXT PHASE

There is a way to go beyond merely managing the current instability, and to capitalize on it. I'm aware that this is not the most opportune moment in American history to disinter Wilsonian idealism, but America does now have the chance to help right some historic wrongs—for one thing, wrongs committed against the Kurds. (There are other peoples, of course, in the Middle East that the U.S. could stand up for, if it weren't quite so committed to the preservation of the existing map; the blacks in the south of Sudan—one of the most disastrous countries created by Europe—would surely like to be free from the Arab government that rules them from Khartoum.)

Iraq has been unstable since its creation because its Kurds and Shiites did not want to be ruled from Baghdad by a Sunni minority. So why not remove one source of instability—the perennially oppressed Kurds—from the formula? Kurdish independence was—literally—one of Wilson's famous Fourteen Points (No. 12, to be precise), and it is quite obviously a moral cause (and no less moral than the cause that preoccupies the West—that of Palestinian independence). There is danger here, of course: Kurdish freedom might spark secessionist impulses among other Middle Eastern ethnic groups. But these impulses already exist, and one lesson from the British

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and French management of the Middle East is that people cannot be suppressed forever.

For the moment, the Kurds of Iraq are playing the American game, officially supporting the U.S. and its flawed vision of Iraqi federalism, in part because the Turks fear Kurdish independence. Turkey has been an important American ally except for the one time when Turkey's friendship would have truly mattered—at the outset of the Iraq War, when Turkey refused to let the American 4th Infantry Division invade northern Iraq from its territory. The U.S. does not owe Turkey quite as much as its advocates think. The Kurds, on the other hand, are the most stalwart U.S. allies in Iraq, and their leaders are certainly the most responsible, working for the country's unity even while hoping for something better for their own people. "If Iraq fails, no one will be able to blame the Kurds," said Barham Salih, a Kurd who is Iraq's deputy prime minister.

The next phase of Middle East history could start 160 miles north of Baghdad, in Kirkuk, which the Kurds consider their Jerusalem. One day, in the home of Abdul Rahman Mustafa, the Kurdish-Iraqi governor there, I learned about the mature position the Kurds are adopting. Over the course of its 20 years, Saddam's regime expelled Kurds from Kirkuk and gave their homes to Arabs from the south. The government now is slowly—too slowly for many Kurds—reversing the expulsions. A group of dignitaries had come to see the governor on Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. To reach the governor's office, you must navigate an endless series of barricades manned by tense-seeming Kurdish soldiers. The house itself is surrounded by blast walls. Kirkuk has a vigorous Sunni terrorist underground, and an enormous car bomb had killed seven people the day before.

I asked the governor, who is an unexcitable lawyer of about 60, if "his people"—I phrased it this way—were seeking independence from Iraq. "My people," he said, "are all the people of Kirkuk." The men seated about his living room nodded in agreement. "My job is to help all the people of Kirkuk have better lives." More nodding. "My friends here all know that we will have justice for those who were hurt in the regime of Saddam, but we will not hurt others in order to get justice." Even more nodding, and mumblings of approval.

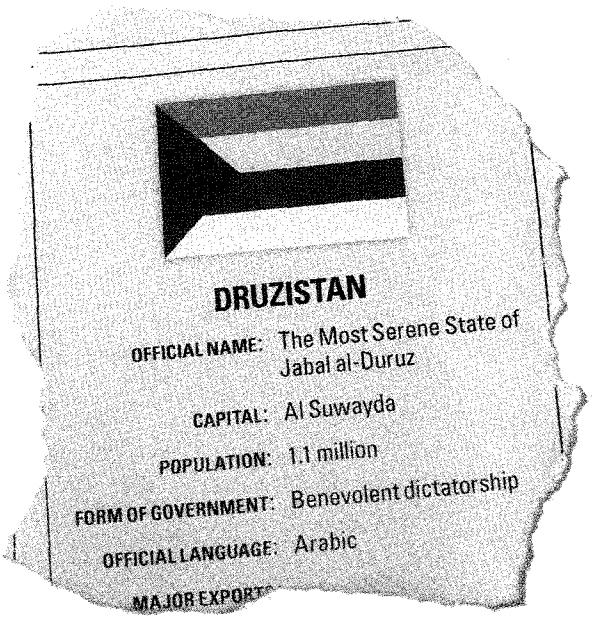
Four men eventually got up to leave. They kissed the governor and then left the house. The governor turned to me and said, "One of those men is Arab. Everyone is welcome here."

I told him I would like to ask my question again. "Do your people want independence from Iraq?"

"Yes, of course my people, most of them, want a new, different situation," he said. "I think—I will be careful now—I think that we will have what we need soon. Please don't ask me any more specific questions about what we need and want."

I asked, instead, for his analysis of the situation—did he think the Sunni-Shiite struggle would become worse, or would it burn out? He laughed. "I cannot predict anything about this country. I would never have predicted that I would be governor of Kirkuk. This is a city that expelled Kurds like me until the Americans came. So I couldn't predict my own future. I only know that we won't go back to the way it was before."

He went on, "I listen to television about the future, but I don't believe anything I hear."



Later that evening, as I was looking over my notes of the conversation, I recalled another comment, made by a man who thought he understood the Middle East. A little over a year ago, I ran into Paul Bremer, the ex-grand vizier of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the man who disbanded the Iraqi army, among other achievements. We were at Reagan National Airport; it was the day after the Iraq Study Group report was released, and I asked Bremer what he thought of it. He said he had not yet read it. I told him that from what I could tell, the experts were already divided on its recommendations. Bremer laughed, and said, with what I'm fairly sure was a complete lack of self-awareness, "Who really is an Iraq expert, anyway?"

Jeffrey Goldberg, an *Atlantic* national correspondent, is the author of *Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror*, which is now out in paperback.

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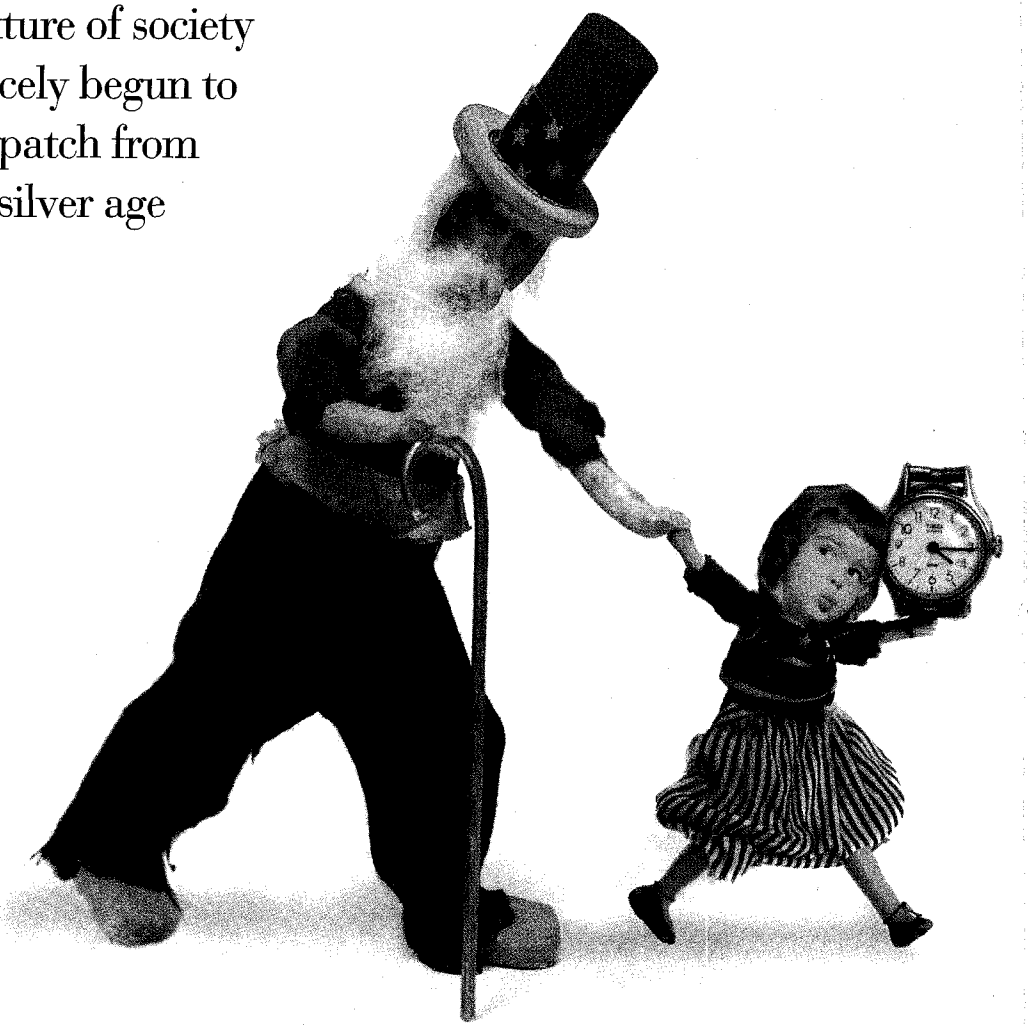
The Baby Boomers' retirement will change the texture of society in ways we've scarcely begun to contemplate. A dispatch from America's coming silver age

BY MEGAN McARDLE

Illustration by Polly Becker



No Country for Young Men

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It is cliché to speak of sleepy little country towns, but my mother's hometown goes beyond sleepy into Rip van Winkle territory. Newark, New York, has more churches than bars. Neat clapboards and stately Victorians line quiet streets wrapped tight around the Erie Canal. Drive through Newark quickly, and it looks like America's past. Stay a little longer, and you begin to recognize it as our future.

Walk into one of those churches on a typical Sunday morning, and you will find only a few, startling islands of brown or blond hair amid a sea of gray. Almost 20 percent of the population is over the age of 65. (The town's economic fortunes have declined along with those of the Erie, and many younger workers have left.) On the street where my mother grew up, and my aunt now lives, the only children you see are visiting their grandparents.

The former Midlakes Middle School, which sits in neighboring Phelps, has transmogrified into "Vienna Gardens," a private independent-living facility where my grandmother now lives. The bones of the schoolhouse are still clearly visible under the carpet and overstuffed couches that line the halls; the residents take their meals in the cavernous former gymnasium. Vienna Gardens is home to 64 people, but the place has an empty feel. The rent is out of the reach of many of the area's seniors.

Those seniors, eventually, may end up at the county nursing home. It is a new and lovely facility. But its supervisors are leery of slipping into the red; most of its residents are on Medicaid, and the program's meager payments don't cover costs. Any overruns would likely be made up through taxes, and the seeds of a tax revolt appear to be germinating. Local property taxes are already high: the school tax alone is 2.5 percent of assessed home value each year. Many of the town's residents grouse about their tax bills. Local school officials are nervously eyeing nearby Monroe County, where the county executive wants to cope with budget woes by diverting school money into county coffers.

As Newark has aged, its commerce and the nature of its workforce have shifted. The Wal-Mart in town is busy, even on a weekday afternoon, and several local clothing stores have closed. While neither phenomenon is unique to Newark, the town's aging has doubtlessly contributed to both: big-box stores appeal to the elderly not only because of lower pricing, but also because they put more goods in one place, enabling seniors who can't walk far, or who have difficulty getting into and out of cars, to make the most of each shopping trip. At the local community college, new programs in health care are proliferating.

At a gala event held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on October 15, Kathleen Casey-Kirschling—born one second after midnight on New Year's Day 1946—became the first Baby Boomer to file for Social Security benefits. Over roughly the next 20 years, close to 80 million of her fellow Boomers will follow suit. By 2030, America will look like Newark. Almost one in five Americans will be in life's golden years, up from about one in eight today.

A lot of op-eds have been written about what will happen when the Boomers retire. Like our policy debates, they tend to focus, somewhat remarkably, on *accounting*. Will the Social Security Trust Fund go bankrupt? Does the trust fund really exist? These questions are too narrow, and they don't yield particularly useful answers. As Newark's experience suggests, the retirement of the Boomers will transform the texture of our society. How will it change our economy, our culture, our politics? When it's over, will America look better, worse, or just different?

Start with the stuff America makes, and the people who make it. Young people buy goods, like cars, houses, and iPods. Old people need services, like transportation, meal preparation, and health care. We have made great strides in enabling the elderly to get around—the scooters you see advertised on daytime television, for example. My grandmother, who is blind and physically frail, was able to live at home much longer than she otherwise could have because she had Meals on Wheels, a home health aide, and a Life Alert-type necklace to call for help in case she fell.

MORE ON THEATLANTIC.COM
For an e-mail roundtable on Boomer retirement (with Megan McArdle, Clive Crook, and Phillip Longman), visit www.theatlantic.com/boomers.

But these services require a lot of labor. According to an analysis by McKinsey Global Institute, the number of hours required to produce an automobile in North America fell by 1.7 percent annually from 1987 to 2002, to an average of about 100 hours. Meanwhile, it still takes about the same amount of time as it always did to drive a senior to a doctor's appointment, or to help an older patient bathe and dress. Productivity growth is faster in the things that kids consume than in the things that the elderly need.

As the Boomers age, they will consume fewer of the things that we produce efficiently, and more of the things that we provide relatively inefficiently. Productivity is notoriously difficult to project, but many forces will be pushing it downward as the Baby Boomers age.

Since services are labor-intensive, and the number of service-consuming seniors will grow rapidly, we'll need

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a lot more workers (that's bad news for those who favor restrictive immigration policies, particularly the kind that keep low-skilled workers out). And, of course, the mix of service workers that we'll need will be different from what it is today. In effect, the next 20 years will require a massive transfer of resources and people away from the care of children, who will decline in relative number, and toward the care of old people.

This rebalancing should have already started, but it hasn't. Consider that approximately 29,000 pediatricians now work in the United States, caring for roughly 75 million children. To care for roughly half that number of patients over 65, the American Geriatrics Society reports, the country has only 7,128 board-certified geriatricians. Just 468 first-year fellowships in geriatric medicine were available in the 2006–2007 academic year; nonetheless, almost half of them went unfilled.

It's not just doctors: according to the John A. Hartford Foundation, which promotes (among other things) geriatric-nursing education, fewer than 20,000 registered nurses and nurse-practitioners are certified in gerontology. Lower-skilled jobs in long-term care, such as certified nursing assistant positions, should theoretically be easier to fill, but several states report that shortages exist in these areas as well.

In part, this is a reflection of pay. Medicare, which bankrolls many of these services, pays for procedures, not outcomes. So surgeons do relatively well from Medicare, while geriatricians, whom you would think Medicare would want to attract, make around $160,000 a year. That's hardly a poverty wage, but since physicians-in-training have other, better-paid options, it's not surprising to see a shortage. Likewise for geriatric RNs; nurses are in demand nationwide, and jobs caring for the elderly usually don't pay especially well.

But low pay is only part of the story. Almost everyone has heard a classmate or friend say they want to "work with children" when they graduate. When was the last time you heard someone say they wanted to "work with old people"? Children represent the future, and your own happy past. The elderly represent your own mortality, and your powerlessness to do anything but manage decline. This will be a major problem for the economy as our society ages. The nursing home in Newark pays a government wage, with government benefits, and in Newark, that's good money. But it struggles with a shortage of RNs, while the local school district has no trouble filling slots.

Of course, if you raise wages enough, you'll find more job-takers, and the shortages will eventually disappear. But that means higher health-care costs (more on this later). It also means more people taking work that they might find emotionally difficult and psychologically unsatisfying, predominantly for the paycheck. How do you tally the social costs of that?

Economic growth derives from a very simple formula; it is basically equal to the increase in the labor force, plus the increase in productivity (the amount that each worker can produce in a given time period). As noted above, the aging of the Boomers will likely dampen productivity growth. That's too bad, because as the Boomers retire, growth in the labor force will also slow. In fact, if a sort of demographic perfect storm arises, the workforce may *shrink*.

For the past two decades, the United States has been in a remarkable sweet spot as far as labor is concerned. The number of annual births was well below the mid-century peak, and the number of elderly was limited by the low birthrates from decades long gone—those of the Great Depression and World War II. As a result, the share of the nation's population in its working years was exceptionally high. The workforce was swollen further—massively so—by the movement of women into paid work, and the accelerating influx of immigrants. But the percentage of women in the workforce seems to be leveling off, and future immigration rates, given the growing political backlash against immigrants, are anyone's guess.

Now come the Boomers, 80 million strong, merrily planning their retirements. Watching their generation move from childhood through adulthood and into old age on demographic charts is like watching a pig move through a python. Thanks to the Boomers' retirement, by 2020, even if immigration continues at roughly its current pace, the workforce looks likely to be only a little bigger than it is today. If immigration rates were to decline precipitously, all else being equal, the labor force would be roughly 1 million people smaller than it is now.

Though we talk about the retirement of the Boomers as an impending event, it has already started. Participation in the workforce generally peaks between the ages of 40 and 44, declines slowly throughout the next decade, and then falls off a cliff. Millions of Baby Boomers have already left the workforce, and as more of them become eligible to collect Social Security, the process will accelerate.

Slower productivity growth and (in the best case) slower workforce growth mean sluggish growth for the economy. That, in turn, will have a host of consequences, ranging from the geopolitical (slower growth could hasten the relative economic decline of the U.S. versus China, India, and other powers) to the social (as the economic historian Benjamin M. Friedman argued in his book, *The Moral Consequences of Growth*, earlier periods of economic stagnation, stretching back to the 19th century, have typically sharpened racism, intolerance, and other unsavory tendencies). But the most visible consequence will probably be on the stock market.

At one point or another, you've probably heard the speculation that once the Boomers start selling their stocks and mutual funds to support their retirement, the

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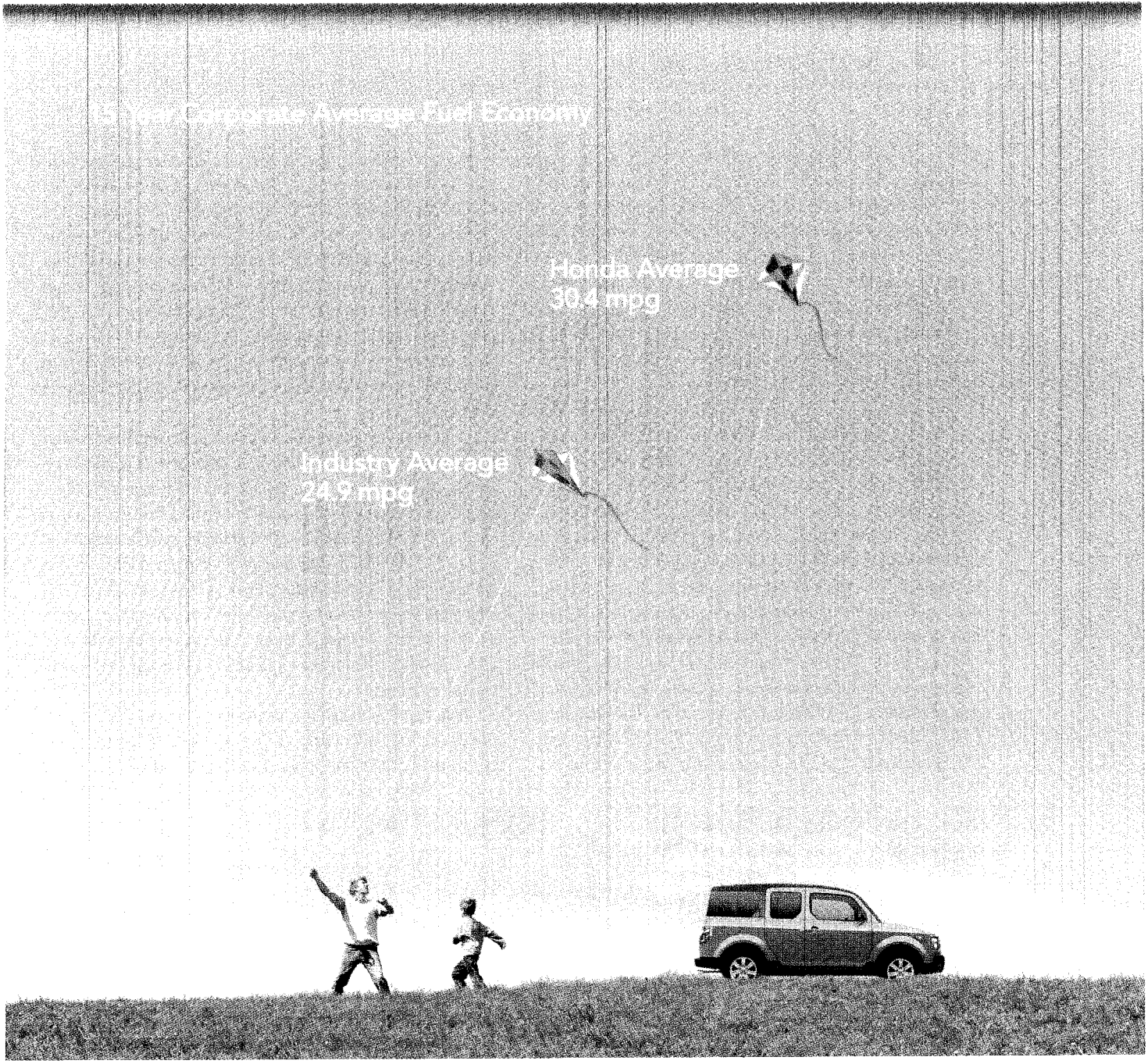

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HONDA
The Power of Dreams

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flood of sales will cause the market to crash. That's plain wrong: the Boomers were born over a period of 18 years, and they will retire over a similar span; moreover, most of them will not start cashing in their stocks immediately. Most people, evidence shows, wait to break into their 401(k)s until they have to. David Wise, the head of the National Bureau of Economic Research's aging program, has, along with his colleagues, run multiple models looking at what will happen as the Boomers sell out, and he believes the effect will likely be modest.

But the outlook for equity markets is cloudy nonetheless. The problem is more basic: stock prices reflect both a company's current earnings and its expected growth in earnings. A high price-to-earnings ratio means investors expect fast growth in future earnings. If you think economic growth is going to slow, the stock market looks overvalued today. Historically, stocks in aggregate have tended to trade at P/E ratios between 12 and 20. Right now, the P/Es of the three major indexes are on the high end of that range, implying the expectation of faster-than-usual economic growth. That sort of growth will be awfully difficult to achieve as the Boomers retire—and the problem could persist for decades. It is possible that, as the Yale economist Irving Fisher infamously said in 1929, "Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."

Despite all that, the Boomers themselves are remarkably optimistic about their prospects. A 2004 survey by the AARP showed that a solid majority are confident of their ability to prepare financially for retirement, which may be why 69 percent of them say that they are fairly or very optimistic about the future. More than 70 percent of them think that they will work at least part-time, but only a quarter expect to do so because they need the money; more are expecting to fulfill dreams of entrepreneurship or just to use work to break up the routine of grandkids, travel, and bingo.

These sunny views are reflected and amplified by the AARP, whose Web site paints a rosy picture of early retirement. And by some media outlets, including the newly launched Retirement Living TV channel (motto: "Inspiring your freedom years"), which features programs such as *Retired & Wired, Living Live!* with Florence Henderson, and *Another Chance for Romance*, which is billed as "the first dating show focusing solely on Baby Boomers." (You must give the Boomers credit: their uncanny ability to focus solely on themselves, approvingly, appears undiminished by age.)

And there *is* cause for optimism, particularly for people planning their early retirement years, rather than confronting their later ones. I met a lot of these people in Newark. They were all terrifically cheerful, and why not? The kids were raised, they had a bit of money saved up, and the next few years looked good. Life expectancies for 65-year-olds have increased dramatically over the past 50 years, from about 14 years more in 1950 to just over 18 years more in 2001. These days, active life expectancy is increasing even faster. Twenty years ago, many patients entered the county nursing home near Newark in their late 60s. Now patients entering before their late 70s or early 80s are viewed as rare tragedies, brought low by some chronic disease like diabetes or kidney failure.

In 1945, the year before the Baby Boomers began entering the world, each retiree in America was supported by 42 workers. Now each retiree is supported by three.

Many analysts have joined the debate over whether the Baby Boomers have saved enough for retirement. Optimists tend to look at the amount Boomers have saved relative to their incomes, compared with how much their parents had saved at the same age. But Boomers are living longer, so they will need more money than their parents did. And even with the new prescription-drug benefit, they can expect to spend more on health care.

Perhaps most important, the Baby Boomers have fewer children. My grandmother has one daughter living nearby to help with shopping, another (my mother) overseeing her finances, and a third who is only a plane-flight away in case of emergency; when my grandfather was dying, my mother drove up to Newark for weeks at a time. My parents' familial support network will be thinner: divorced and living in different cities, they will have to share the same two daughters. Given the vicissitudes of the modern economy, neither child may be living nearby when help is required. This is demographically typical, which means that not only will the Boomers be paying for help that family used to provide, they will also have fewer people to call on for financial assistance.

But the confidence of the Boomers in their finances is hard to justify, and seems to rely on some mystical alchemy of strong stock gains, housing value increases, and government largesse. The first, as we've seen, may disappoint. The second seems outright fantastic. As the economist Robert J. Shiller, author of *Irrational Exuberance*, has pointed out, once you account for inflation and home improvements, house values in the United States were typically pretty flat throughout the 20th century: the boom in housing that began in the mid-1990s is a huge historical anomaly. The Case-Shiller index, which

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tracks housing prices nationally, shows that despite a slight fall since 2006, prices are still more than double what they were in 1997, and have increased much faster than the growth in rents—a sign of unsustainable price growth. (And yet, Shiller's surveys show that Americans still expect 5 percent or more in annual appreciation from their homes.) As for government largesse, Social Security typically provides just a little more than 40 percent of the average retiree's income, yet the program's finances are already strained.

Shiller more or less agrees with the 70 percent of Boomers who say they plan to keep working: he says they'll have to. And while some, mostly affluent Boomers will surely find the work-as-personal-fulfillment that they expect—mayorships or artistry or part-time teaching; nonprofit work or light consulting as a coda to a successful business career; reinvention at 65—for a larger number, the destination is more likely to be someplace like Wal-Mart. Nationwide, that company employs hundreds of thousands of older workers, many of them retired from other jobs. The AARP's list of elder-friendly companies leans heavily on temp agencies and retail establishments like Home Depot, Staples, and Walgreens.

If the Boomers really do work in large numbers, many ills will be cured. Contrary to stereotypes, seniors are valuable workers. Though research shows that some cognitive abilities, such as memory and calculation, can decline with age, seniors' experience has generally endowed them with other skills, particularly "soft skills" like customer service and management. Later retirements by some workers would increase the size of the economic pie and ease the burden of providing for those who do retire. David Wise estimates that if the Boomers stayed in the workforce an average of five more years, by 2030 GDP could be 7 to 8 percent bigger than it otherwise would be. That translates into enough tax revenue to make a major dent in Social Security's budget gap (though not Medicare's much larger problems).

So the trillion-dollar question is, Will the Boomers really work in large numbers as they hit the traditional retirement years? Whatever they say beforehand, very few people over the age of 65 do. Labor-force participation rates among seniors are far lower than they were in 1950, even though life expectancies have risen. In 1950, almost half of all men over 65 were still working. Now, that figure is less than 20 percent.

Part of this is the result of pensions and Social Security benefits—and the decline of pensions, combined with low savings, will surely cause some rebound in senior work rates (indeed, a small rebound has already occurred). But it's also the perverse result of a social bargain we've made with our workers: you accept slightly lower wages than you're worth when you're young in exchange for steady increases as you age. The problem is, this makes older workers expensive compared with young people, and harder to reemploy if they lose their jobs. Wages are what economists call "sticky": they rarely adjust downward, except after long agony.

Somewhere around the age of 45 or 50, the experience of losing a job seems to change dramatically. Whatever the reason behind the job loss, long-term unemployment becomes a much more likely prospect. People older than this are sometimes unwilling to accept a new, lower-paying or lower-status position, even if that refusal causes substantial economic hardship. Instead, they may label themselves consultants and wait for a job comparable to the one they lost, one that, in all too many cases, never comes along; or go on disability; or simply exit the workforce altogether.

Accepting a lower wage feels too much like accepting a lower value on yourself—and for seniors and near-seniors, accepting that you have peaked economically. Even without age discrimination, this would limit the employment prospects of older workers. And both anecdotal evidence and government data suggest that age discrimination is a persistent ill.

One of the greatest challenges for the country will be creating good jobs for seniors, ideally ones closer to where they built their skills and knowledge than the aisles of Staples or Home Depot—ones in which they'll be the most productive. There's no national bureau that can bring about this change. It must emerge organically, from companies learning to accommodate their older workers on the one hand, and finding creative ways to mask or reduce the emotional impact of pay cuts on the other. And from changed expectations on the part of 60-somethings about career paths and hierarchy.

Until that happens—and even once it does—our politics are likely to be contentious, because to many people, spanning several generations, it may feel as if there's not enough money to go around. And indeed there's no getting around these facts: in 1945, the year before the Baby Boomers began entering the world, each retiree in America was supported by 42 workers. Now each retiree is supported by three. When the Boomers are fully retired, each of them will be supported by just two.

What happens when currently optimistic Boomers finally face the hard realities of their savings accounts? Will they ask for more from the government? At a bare minimum, seniors already struggling with their finances are not apt to look kindly on benefit cuts. Yet the cost of the benefits we've already promised them will weigh heavily on the workers expected to support a half-Boomer apiece.

Social Security is the comparatively easy problem to solve. It will go from consuming 4.3 percent of GDP

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in 2007 to absorbing about 6.2 percent in 2030. That's a big jump—if the cost were spread evenly, it would be equivalent to about a 5 percent increase in payroll taxes for each worker—but by and large, the economy will be able to cope.

Medicare is a different story. Health-care costs now consume about 16 percent of GDP, but projections by the Department of Health and Human Services suggest that by 2016, that will have risen to almost 20 percent. Wise speculates that closing the Medicare budgetary gap would require a tax increase of something on the order of 8 to 12 percent of total payroll. That is a massive tax increase—$4,000 to $6,000 a year on a $50,000 income (again assuming the tax were spread evenly). Many economists and budget analysts have drawn up plans intended to fix Social Security, through some combination of benefit cuts, higher retirement ages, and tax increases. But almost no one claims to have any good ideas about Medicare.

Stories of America's aging often unfurl like disaster tales, and I suppose this one has, too; it's hard not to sound gloomy when looking at the various ledgers involved in the Boomers' retirement. But as I walk along Main Street in Newark on a fall day, the statistics seem less oppressive. The town may be aging, and the economy falling behind the rest of the country, but people around me look about as happy as people everywhere else. Not only that, but their lives are still getting better.

Statistics can always tell two stories. If we catch criminals, incarceration rates will rise; if we cut infant mortality rates, education budgets five years later will show the strain. The statistics on America's demographic transition are no exception. We are all, to be sure, going to die, but not as soon as we used to—and so our pension bill will rise. Medical science is improving by leaps and bounds, making us healthier and longer-lived—and so our health-care bills will grow. Technological progress will continue to raise our living standards and grow our economy as seniors leave the workforce—it's only the rate of growth that will decline.

We should not look away from the darker side of life in an aging society. It would be better to avoid Newark's problems: slow economic growth, a heavy tax burden, the political problems that come with dividing limited resources between young and old. There is still time for policy fixes (particularly in Social Security, Medicare, and immigration) to avert some of the worst problems, so it makes sense to focus on what, exactly, we are trying to avoid.

But it's also worth remembering that the problems are only a part, and not the largest part, of life in Newark. Which, despite the problems, is still pretty good. Incomes may not be growing as fast as they once did, but Wal-Mart and the Internet make wages go farther than they used to. I am toting a new digital camera bought at the local Wal-Mart for less than my grandfather would have paid for a mid-range film model in the 1970s. And I have with me a lunch of fresh bread and artisanal cheese purchased at Wegmans, a supermarket light-years away from the TV-dinner-and-canned-soup horror of my mother's youth.

Shopping is the least of it. Everywhere I go, I meet people who would never have lived so long if they'd been born a few decades earlier. Indeed, I'm one of them; I'd likely be deaf without penicillin for childhood ear infections, and dead without the albuterol inhaler that was only approved in the U.S. in 1981. Western New York is not the mighty economic colossus that once let Buffalo boast more millionaires per capita than any other city in America, but it is still a better place to live in now than it was then. And it is getting better all the time.

That, too, is our future. Aging will make the economy grow more slowly than we would like, and probably more slowly than we are used to. Social Security and Medicare will almost certainly be financed by a combination of benefit cuts, increased taxes, and higher retirement ages—which means that all of us will work longer than we want to, and pay more in taxes than we have before.

You must give the Boomers credit: their uncanny ability to focus solely on themselves, approvingly, appears undiminished by age.

The political battles over all of this will be bitter, and they will probably be, too often, won by the retirees, who vote in force (though not always as a bloc). Those same retirees may also vote against things that are actually in their interest—thus shutting out the immigrants who could help them stay at home, and out of the nursing home, longer; turning down school taxes that could create a more productive workforce to support them; fighting for zoning restrictions that make it harder for the low-income workers who provide their services to live within easy commuting distance.

But if we will be worse off than we could be in an ideal world, we will still be better off than we are now, workers and retirees alike. We'll not only be at least somewhat richer; we'll also have years and years more to enjoy our health and wealth. The past in Newark is lovely, but the future, while not without its blemishes, is likely to be better still.

Megan McArdle, an *Atlantic* associate editor, blogs at meganmcardle.theatlantic.com.

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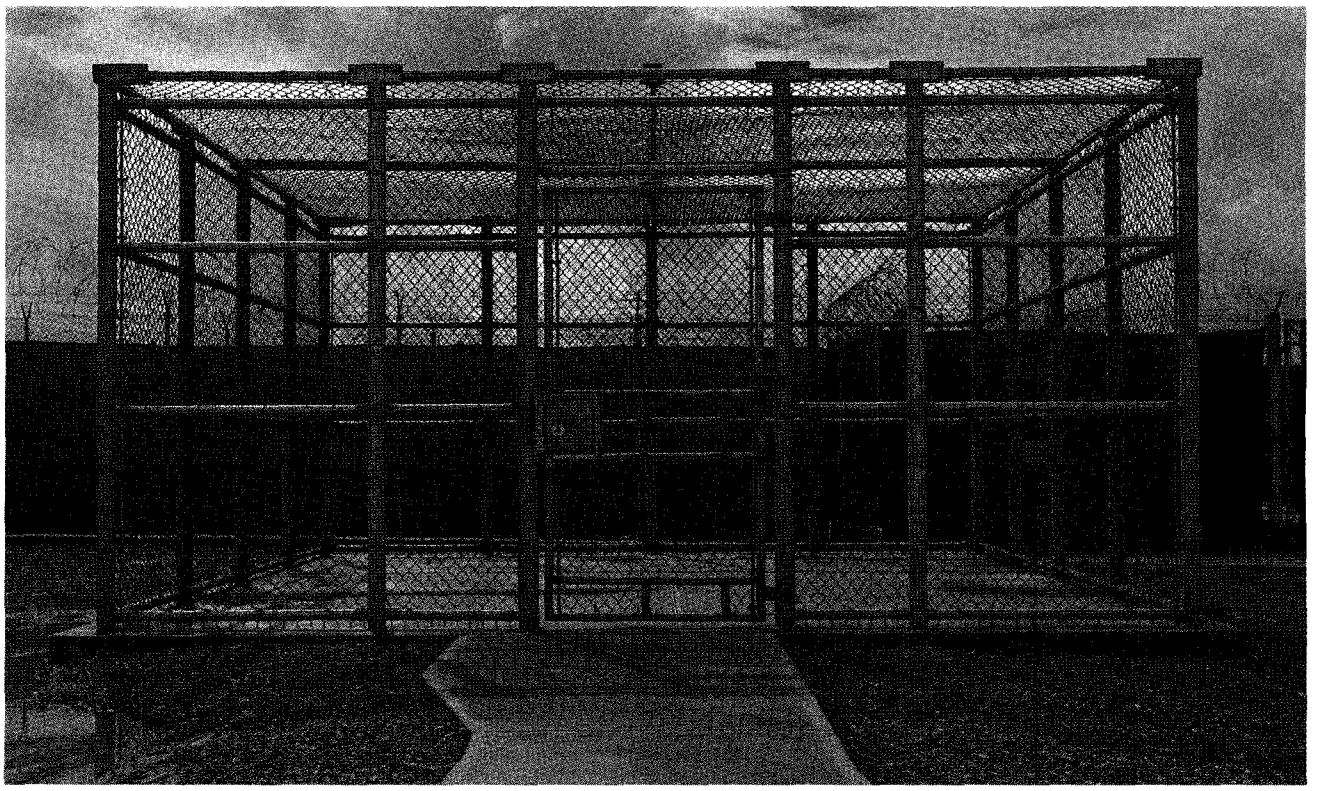

▲ **A recreation area for noncompliant detainees at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility.** According to the recently leaked Guantánamo *Standard Operating Procedures* manual from 2003, "Detainees will receive two 20-minute recreation periods a week."

Inside Guantánamo

TEXT BY ANDREW SULLIVAN | PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOUIE PALU

In his famous essay "A Hanging," George Orwell wrote of witnessing an execution in British-run Burma:

> It was about forty yards to the gallows. I watched the bare brown back of the prisoner marching in front of me ... And once, in spite of the men who gripped him by each shoulder, he stepped slightly aside to avoid a puddle on the path. It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man.

It is the specificity of the image that resurrects the moral question. In the long and sometimes bitter debate over the Bush administration's policies on detention and interrogation of prisoners in the war on terror, the abstractions are so familiar we have become almost numb to them. We hear the word *Gitmo* and it stands for a way of conducting a war, for an era that has indeed made the Geneva Conventions seem "quaint," a time in which even torture has been euphemized into "enhanced interrogation techniques" or "aggressive questioning," a moment in American history when even the attorney general refuses to call waterboarding a crime.

But Guantánamo Bay is also an actual place. Behind every abstract story of another hunger strike, there is a feeding tube; behind every media controversy about alleged abuse of the Koran, there is a Holy Book somewhere, suspended in a surgical mask. The photographs on these pages refer to a place, buildings, lives. They refer to prisoners and guards who experience rain and concrete, blood and saliva and fear. As Orwell also put it, "To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle." ▲

Andrew Sullivan, an *Atlantic* senior editor, blogs at andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com. Louie Palu is an award-winning photographer based in Washington, D.C.

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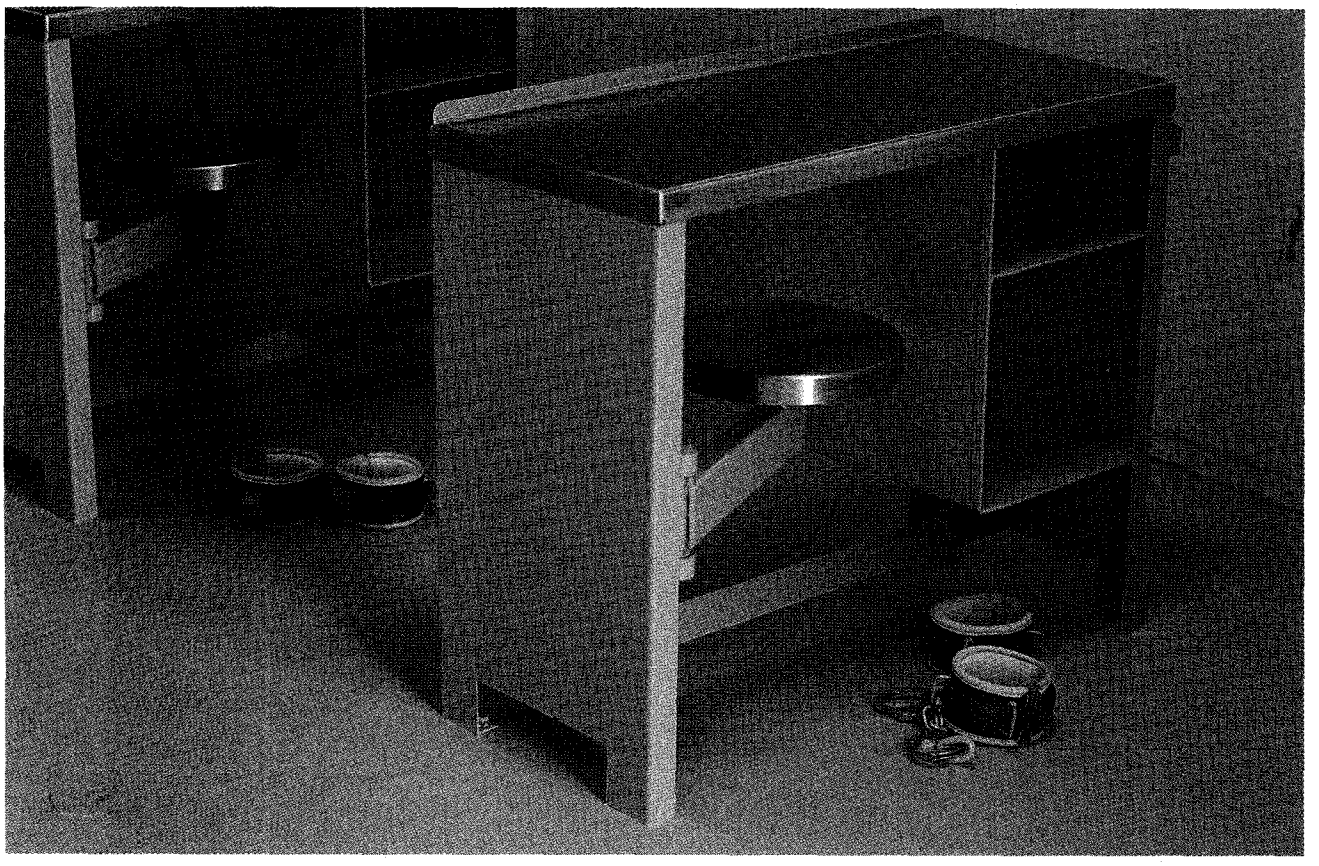
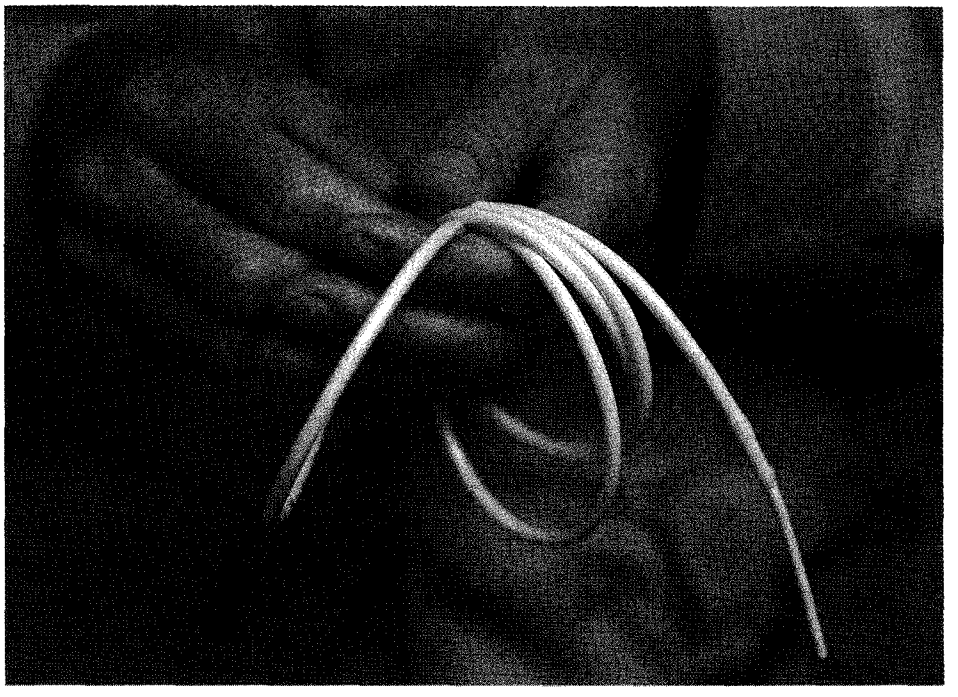


▲ **Leg restraints next to a desk in the detainee classroom in Camp Four, where the most-compliant detainees are housed.** The U.S. government is holding some 340 "enemy combatants" at Guantánamo Bay. Fewer than 20 percent of Guantánamo inmates have been members of al-Qaeda, a *National Journal* study suggested. The same survey concluded that a high percentage, perhaps the majority, of inmates were not captured on any battlefield, but were handed over by Afghan warlords or Pakistanis in return for rewards. Of the nearly 800 detainees who have reportedly been housed at Guantánamo since January 2002, approximately 445 have been released or transferred.



▶ **A feeding tube of the type used on detainees who go on hunger strikes.** The striker is restrained while the feeding tube is passed through his nose. Hunger strikes have recurred at the camp since it opened. According to *The New York Times*, the peak number of simultaneous hunger strikers was more than 130, in September 2005. The largest number of those restrained and force-fed was 15, in March 2006. In June 2006, three inmates who were on hunger strikes succeeded in hanging themselves.

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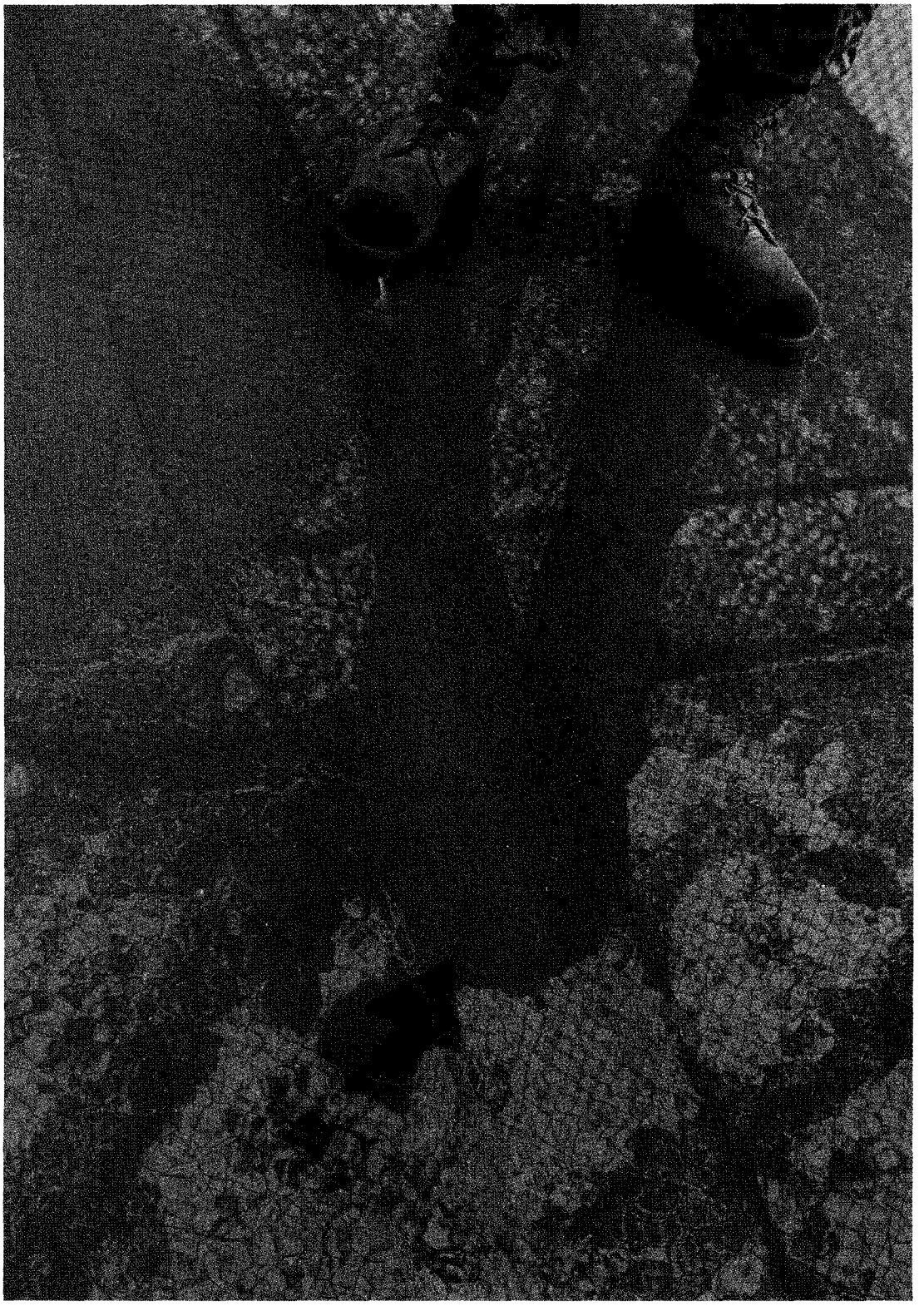

▲ **A member of the U.S. military reflected in rainwater in a detainee recreation area in Camp One.** An arrow gives the direction and distance (12,793 kilometers) to Mecca for Muslim detainees who wish to worship. A leaked logbook of the interrogation of Mohammed al-Qahtani, a high-value detainee, records the following techniques: he was interrogated for 18 to 20 hours a day for 48 of 54 days; he was doused with water and kept in a room air-conditioned to induce hypothermia; he was hooded and menaced by a dog; he was injected with fluids and forced to urinate on himself. All of these interrogation methods were personally approved by then–Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

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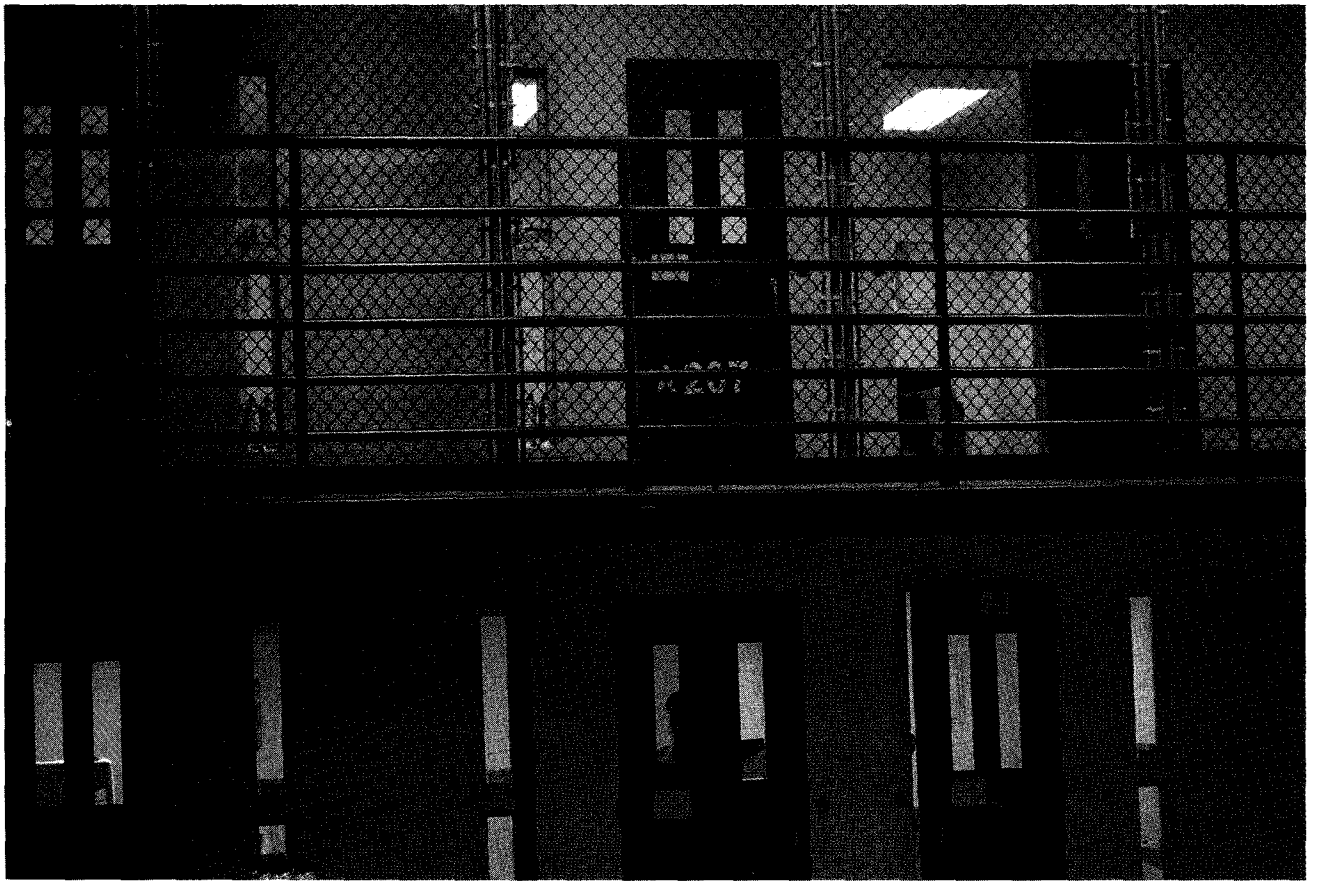
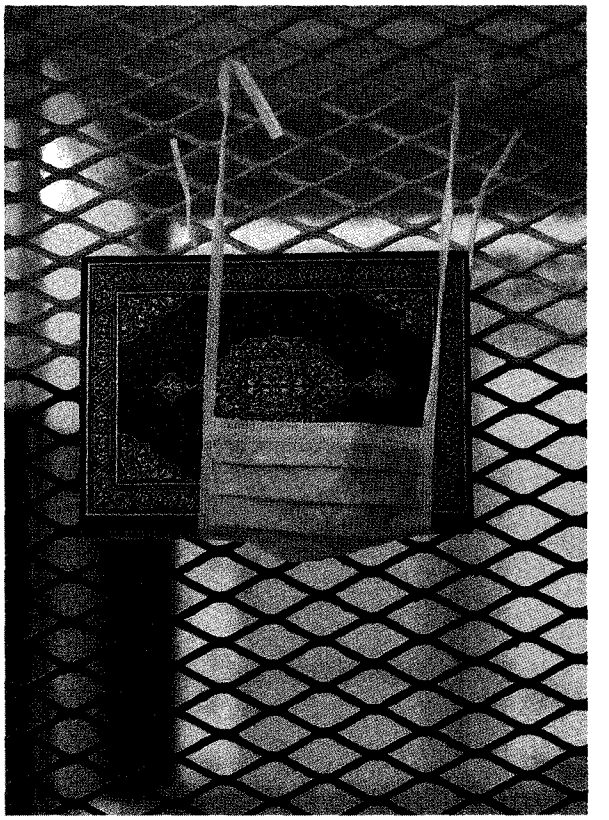


▲ **Detainee cells in Camp Six, the newest detention facility at Guantánamo.** One detainee can be seen in the center lower cell. The 2003 manual spells out four levels of detainee access to the International Committee of the Red Cross:

a. No Access: No contact of any kind with the ICRC. This includes the delivery of ICRC mail.
b. Restricted: ICRC is allowed to ask the detainee about health and welfare only. No prolonged questions.
c. Unrestricted: ICRC is allowed full access to talk to the detainee.
d. Visual: Access is restricted to visual inspection of the detainee's condition. No form of communication is permitted. No delivery of ICRC mail.



▶ **A Koran is suspended by a surgical mask from the wall of a cell at Camp One.** More than 1,600 Korans were issued to inmates between January 2002 and June 2005. The use of surgical masks to hold Korans enables inmates to keep the books off the floor, thus avoiding sacrilegious contamination. Alleged abuse of the Koran by guards and interrogators has led to several hunger strikes by prisoners. In June 2005, the U.S. Southern Command confirmed that five cases of Koran mistreatment had occurred over a period of two and a half years.

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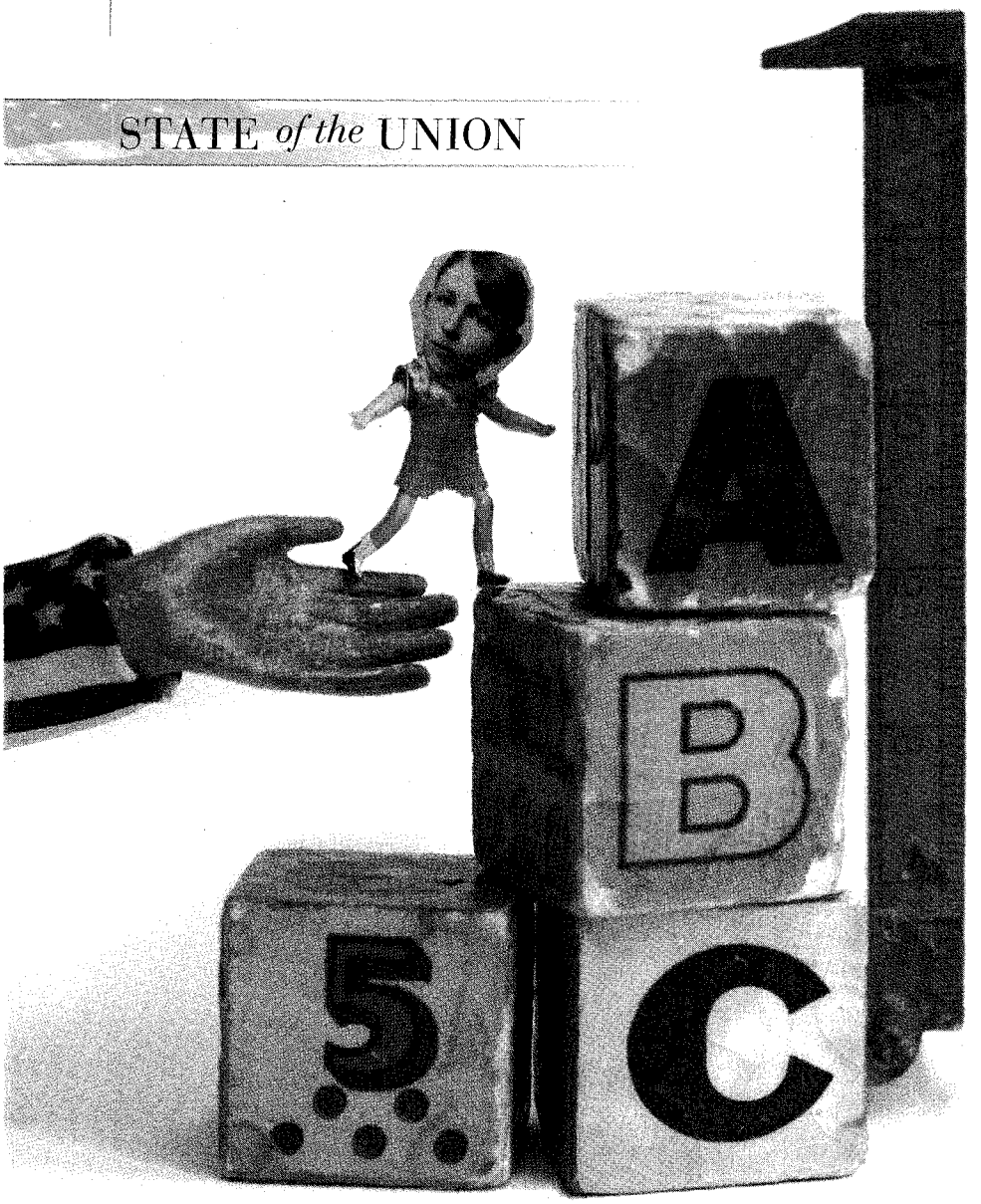

A modest proposal to fix the schools

BY MATT MILLER

Illustration by Polly Becker

First, Kill All the School Boards

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WHAT HORACE SAW

It wasn't just the slate and pencil on every desk, or the absence of daily beatings. As Horace Mann sat in a Leipzig classroom in the summer of 1843, it was the entire Prussian system of schools that impressed him. Mann was six years into the work as Massachusetts secretary of education that would earn him lasting fame as the "father of public education." He had sailed from Boston to England several weeks earlier with his new wife, combining a European honeymoon with educational fact-finding. In England, the couple had been startled by the luxury and refinement of the upper classes, which exceeded anything they had seen in America and stood in stark contrast to the poverty and ignorance of the masses. If the United States was to avoid this awful chasm and the social upheaval it seemed sure to create, he thought, education was the answer. Now he was seeing firsthand the Prussian schools that were the talk of reformers on both sides of the Atlantic.

In Massachusetts, Mann's vision of "common schools," publicly funded and attended by all, represented an inspiring democratic advance over the state's hodgepodge of privately funded and charity schools. But beyond using the bully pulpit, Mann had little power to make his vision a reality. Prussia, by contrast, had a system designed from the center. School attendance was compulsory. Teachers were trained at national institutes with the same care that went into training military officers. Their enthusiasm for their subjects was contagious, and their devotion to students evoked reciprocal affection and respect, making Boston's routine resort to classroom whippings seem barbaric.

Mann also admired Prussia's rigorous national curriculum and tests. The results spoke for themselves: illiteracy had been vanquished. To be sure, Prussian schools sought to create obedient subjects of the kaiser—hardly Mann's aim. Yet the lessons were undeniable, and Mann returned home determined to share what he had seen. In the seventh of his legendary "Annual Reports" on education to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, he touted the benefits of a national system and cautioned against the "calamities which result ... from leaving this most important of all the functions of a government to chance."

Mann's epiphany that summer put him on the wrong side of America's tradition of radical localism when it came to schools. And although his efforts in the years that followed made Massachusetts a model for taxpayer-funded schools and state-sponsored teacher training, the obsession with local control—not incidentally, an almost uniquely American obsession—still dominates U.S. education to this day. For much of the 150 or so years between Mann's era and now, the system served us adequately: during that time, we extended more schooling to more people than any nation had before and rose to superpower status. But let's look at what local control gives us today, in the "flat" world in which our students will have to compete.

The United States spends more than nearly every other nation on schools, but out of 29 developed countries in a 2003 assessment, we ranked 24th in math and in problem-solving, 18th in science, and 15th in reading. Half of all black and Latino students in the U.S. don't graduate on time (or ever) from high school. As of 2005, about 70 percent of eighth-graders were not proficient in reading. By the end of eighth grade, what passes for a math curriculum in America is two years behind that of other countries.

Dismal fact after dismal fact; by now, they are hardly news. But in the 25 years since the landmark report *A Nation at Risk* sounded the alarm about our educational mediocrity, America's response has been scattershot and ineffective, orchestrated mainly by some 15,000 school districts acting alone, with help more recently from the states. It's as if after Pearl Harbor, FDR had suggested we prepare for war through the uncoordinated efforts of thousands of small factories; they'd know what kinds of planes and tanks were needed, right?

When you look at what local control of education has wrought, the conclusion is inescapable: we must carry Mann's insights to their logical end and nationalize our schools, to some degree. But before delving into the details of why and how, let's back up for a moment and consider what brought us to this pass.

130,000 LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSES

Our system is, more than anything, an artifact of our Colonial past. For the religious dissenters who came to the New World, literacy was essential to religious freedom, enabling them to teach their own beliefs. Religion and schooling moved in tandem across the Colonies. Many people who didn't like what the local minister was preaching would move on and found their own church, and generally their own school.

This preference for local control of education dovetailed with the broader ethos of the American Revolution and the Founders' distrust of distant, centralized authority. Education was left out of the Constitution; in the 10th Amendment, it is one of the unnamed powers

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reserved for the states, which in turn passed it on to local communities. Eventually the United States would have 130,000 school districts, most of them served by a one-room school. These little red schoolhouses, funded primarily through local property taxes, became the iconic symbols of democratic American learning.

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, nothing really challenged this basic structure. Eventually many rural districts were consolidated, and the states assumed a greater role in school funding; since the 1960s, the federal government has offered modest financial aid to poorer districts as well. But neither these steps, nor the standards-based reform movement inspired by *A Nation at Risk*, brought significant change.

Many reformers across the political spectrum agree that local control has become a disaster for our schools. But the case against it is almost never articulated. Public officials are loath to take on powerful school-board associations and teachers' unions; foundations and advocacy groups, who must work with the boards and unions, also pull their punches. For these reasons, as well as our natural preference for having things done nearby, support for local control still lingers, largely unexamined, among the public.

If you thought No Child Left Behind was fixing our schools, think again.

NO PROBLEM LEFT BEHIND

Why is local control such a failure when applied to our schools? After all, political decentralization has often served America well, allowing decisions to be made close to where their impact would be felt. But in education, it has spawned several crippling problems:

No way to know how children are doing. "We're two decades into the standards movement in this country, and standards are still different by classroom, by school, by district, and by state," says Tom Vander Ark, who headed the education program at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation from 1999 through 2006. "Most teachers in America still pretty much teach whatever they want."

If you thought President Bush's 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation was fixing these problems, think again. True, NCLB requires states to establish standards in core subjects and to test children in grades 3–8 annually, with the aim of making all students "proficient" by 2014. But by leaving standards and definitions of "proficiency" to state discretion, it has actually made matters worse. *The Proficiency Illusion*, a report released in October by the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, details how. "'Proficiency' varies wildly from state to state, with 'passing scores' ranging from the 6th percentile to the 77th," the researchers found:

> Congress erred big-time when NCLB assigned each state to set its own standards and devise and score its own tests ... this study underscores the folly of a big modern nation, worried about its global competitiveness, nodding with approval as Wisconsin sets its eighth-grade reading passing level at the 14th percentile while South Carolina sets its at the 71st percentile.

The lack of uniform evaluation creates a "tremendous risk of delusion about how well children are actually doing," says Chris Cerf, the deputy chancellor of schools in New York City. That delusion makes it far more difficult to enact reforms—and even to know where reforms are needed. "Schools may get an award from their state for high performance, and under federal guidelines they may be targeted for closure for low performance," Vander Ark says. This happens in California, he told me, all the time.

Stunted R&D. Local control has kept education from attracting the research and development that drives progress, because benefits of scale are absent. There are some 15,000 curriculum departments in this country—one for every district. None of them can afford to invest in deeply understanding what works best when it comes to teaching reading to English-language learners, or using computers to develop customized strategies for students with different learning styles. Local-control advocates would damn the federal government if it tried to take on such things. Perhaps more important, the private sector generally won't pursue them, either. Purchasing decisions are made by a complex mix of classroom, school, and school board officials. The more complicated and fragmented the sale that a company has to make, the less willing it is to invest in product research and development.

Incompetent school boards and union dominance. "In the first place, God made idiots," Mark Twain once wrote. "This was for practice. Then He made School Boards." Things don't appear to have improved much since Twain's time. "The job has become more difficult, more complicated, and more political, and as a result, it's driven out many of the good candidates," Vander Ark says. "So while teachers' unions have become more sophisticated and have smarter people who are better-equipped and -prepared at the table, the quality of school-board members,

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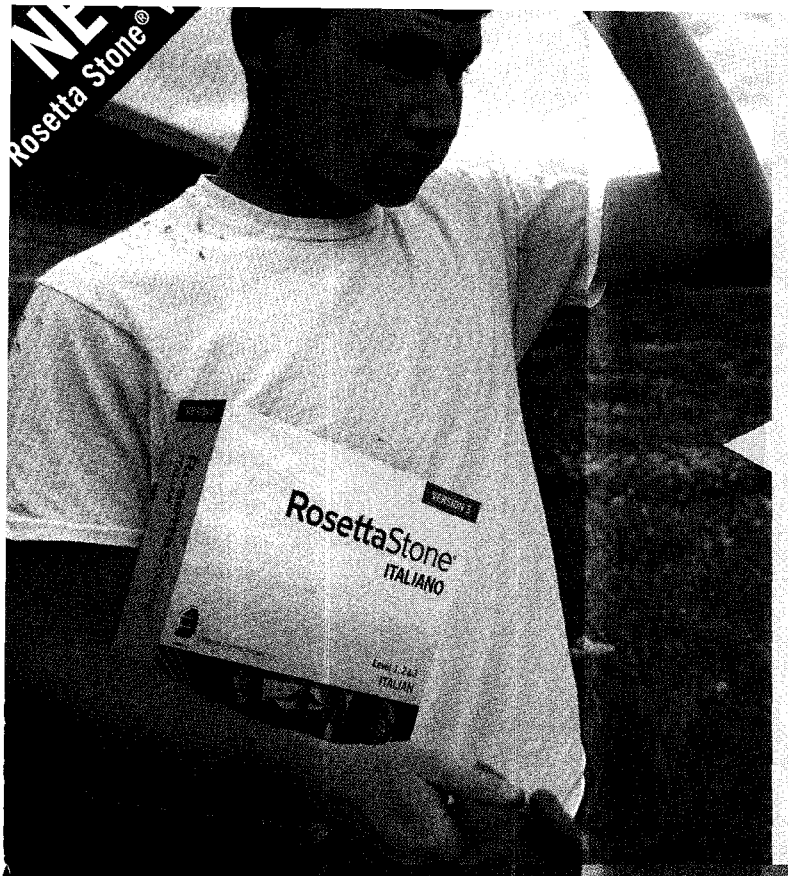

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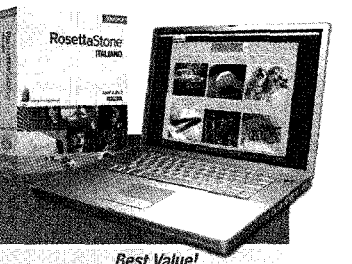

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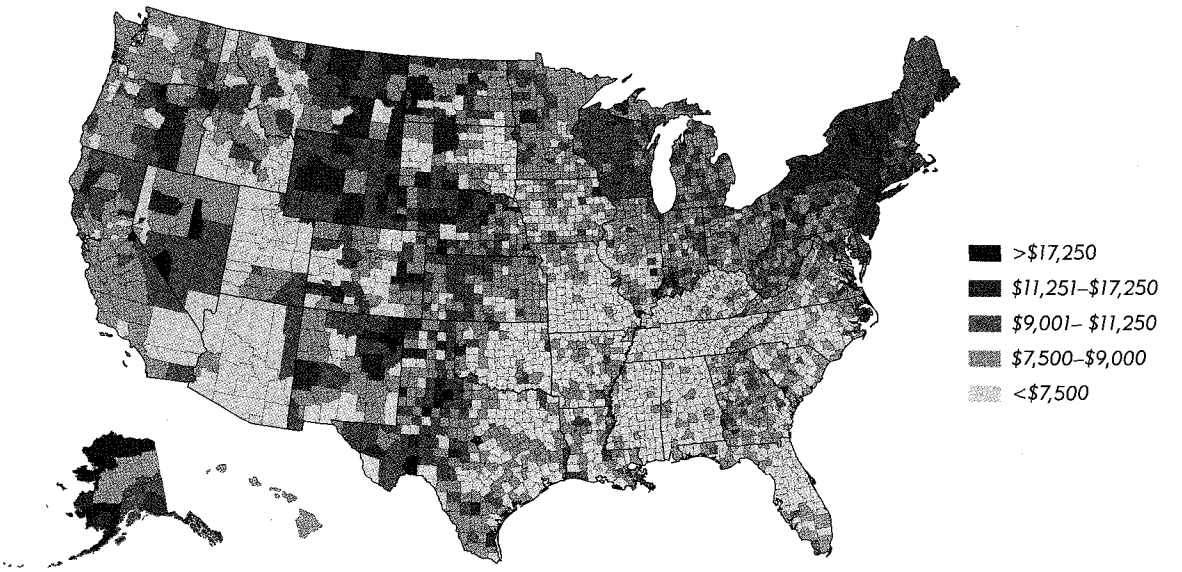
PER-PUPIL SPENDING IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS, BY COUNTY (2004–2005)



particularly in urban areas, has decreased." Board members routinely spend their time on minor matters, from mid-level personnel decisions to bus routes. "The tradition goes back to the rural era, where the school board hired the schoolmarm and oversaw the repair of the roof, looked into the stove in the room, and deliberated on every detail of operating the schools," says Michael Kirst, an emeritus professor of education at Stanford University. "A lot of big-city school boards still do these kinds of things." Because of Progressive-era reforms meant to get school boards out of "politics," most urban school districts are independent, beyond the reach of mayors and city councils. Usually elected in off-year races that few people vote in or even notice, school boards are, in effect, accountable to no one.

Local control essentially surrenders power over the schools to the teachers' unions. Union money and mobilization are often decisive in board elections. And local unions have hefty intellectual and political backing from their state and national affiliates. Even when they're not in the unions' pockets, in other words, school boards are outmatched.

The unions are adept at negotiating new advantages for their members, spreading their negotiating strategies to other districts in the state, and getting these advantages embodied in state and sometimes federal law as well. This makes it extraordinarily difficult for superintendents to change staffing, compensation, curriculum, and other policies. Principals, for their part, are compliance machines, spending their days making sure that federal, state, and district programs are implemented. Meanwhile, common-sense reforms, like offering higher pay to attract teachers to underserved specialties such as math, science, and special education, can't get traction, because the unions say no.

Financial inequity. The dirty little secret of local control is the enormous tax advantage it confers on better-off Americans: communities with high property wealth can tax themselves at low rates and still generate far more dollars per pupil than poor communities taxing themselves heavily. This wasn't always the case: in the 19th century, property taxes were rightly seen as the fairest way to pay for education, since property was the main form of wealth, and the rich and poor tended to live near one another. But the rise of commuter suburbs since World War II led to economically segregated communities; today, the spending gap between districts can be thousands of dollars per pupil.

But local taxes represent only 44 percent of overall school funding; the spending gaps between states, which contribute 47 percent of total spending, account for most of the financial inequity. Perversely, Title I, the federal aid program enacted in the 1960s to boost poor schools, has widened the gaps, because it distributes money largely according to how much states are already spending.

WHAT WOULD HORACE DO?

I asked Marc Tucker, the head of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (a 2006 bipartisan panel that called for an overhaul of the education system), how he convinces people that local control is hobbling our schools. He said he asks a simple question: If we have the second-most-expensive K–12 system of all those measured by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, but consistently perform between the middle and the bottom of the pack, shouldn't we examine the systems of countries that spend less and get better results? "I then point out that the system of local control that we have is almost unique," Tucker says. "One

SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS
MAP BY RYAN MORRIS

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then has to defend a practice that is uncharacteristic of the countries with the best performance.

"It's an industrial-benchmarking argument," he adds.

Horace Mann wouldn't have used this jargon, but his thinking was much the same. In his time, the challenge was to embrace a bigger role for the state; today, the challenge is to embrace a bigger role for the federal government in standards, funding, and other arenas.

The usual explanation for why national standards won't fly is that the right hates "national" and the left hates "standards." But that's changing. Two Republican former secretaries of education, Rod Paige and William Bennett, now support national standards and tests, writing in *The Washington Post*: "In a world of fierce economic competition, we can't afford to pretend that the current system is getting us where we need to go." On the Democratic side, John Podesta, a former chief of staff to President Clinton and the current president of the Center for American Progress (where I'm a senior fellow), told me that he believes the public is far ahead of the established political wisdom, which holds that the only safe way to discuss national standards is to stipulate that they are "optional" or "voluntary"—in other words, not "national" at all.

Recent polling suggests he's right. Two surveys conducted for the education campaign Strong American Schools, which I advised in 2006, found that a majority of Americans think there should be uniform national standards. Most proponents suggest we start by establishing standards and tests in grades 3–12 in the core subjects—reading, math, and science—and leave more-controversial subjects, such as history, until we have gotten our feet wet.

According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, the federal government accounts for 9 percent, or $42 billion, of our K–12 spending. If we're serious about improving our schools, and especially about raising up the lowest, Uncle Sam's contribution must rise to 25 or 30 percent of the total (a shift President Nixon considered). Goodwin Liu, a University of California at Berkeley law professor who has studied school financing, suggests that a higher federal contribution could be used in part to bring all states up to a certain minimum per-pupil funding. It could also, in my view, fund conditional grants to boost school performance. For example, federal aid could be offered to raise teachers' salaries in poor schools, provided that states or districts take measures such as linking pay to performance and deferring or eliminating tenure. Big grants might be given to states that adopt new national standards, making those standards "voluntary" but hard to refuse. The government also needs to invest much more heavily in research. It now spends $28 billion annually on research at the National Institutes of Health, but only $260 million—not even 1 percent of that amount—on R&D for education.

What of school boards? In an ideal world, we would scrap them—especially in big cities, where most poor children live. That's the impulse behind a growing drive for mayoral control of schools. New York and Boston have used mayoral authority to sustain what are among the most far-reaching reform agendas in the country, including more-rigorous curricula and a focus on better teaching and school leadership. Of course, the chances of eliminating school boards anytime soon are nil. But we can at least recast and limit their role.

We need to give schools one set of national expectations, free educators and parents to collaborate, and get everything else out of the way.

In all of these efforts, we must understand one paradox: only by transcending local control can we create genuine autonomy for our schools. "If you visit schools in many other parts of the world," Marc Tucker says, "you're struck almost immediately ... by a sense of autonomy on the part of the school staff and principal that you don't find in the United States." Research in 46 countries by Ludger Woessmann of the University of Munich has shown that setting clear external standards while granting real discretion to schools in how to meet them is the most effective way to run a system. We need to give schools one set of national expectations, free educators and parents to collaborate locally in whatever ways work, and get everything else out of the way.

Nationalizing our schools even a little goes against every cultural tradition we have, save the one that matters most: our capacity to renew ourselves to meet new challenges. Once upon a time a national role in retirement funding was anathema; then suddenly, after the Depression, we had Social Security. Once, a federal role in health care would have been rejected as socialism; now, federal money accounts for half of what we spend on health care. We started down this road on schooling a long time ago. Time now to finish the journey.

Matt Miller is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and the author of *The Two Percent Solution: Fixing America's Problems in Ways Liberals and Conservatives Can Love* (2003). He is at work on a new book, *The Tyranny of Dead Ideas*.

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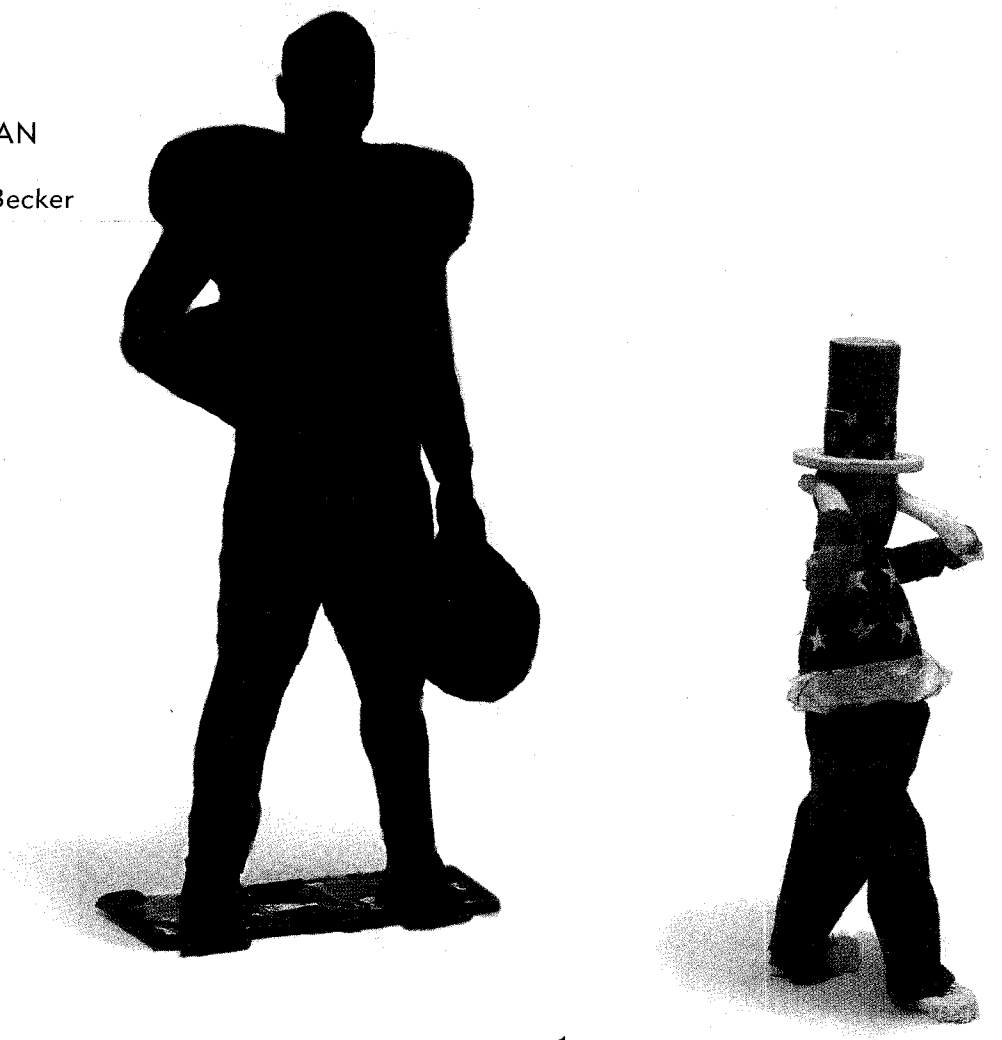
Why America's black-and-white narratives about race don't reflect reality

BY AMY WALDMAN

Illustration by Polly Becker



The Truth About Jena

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In the fall of 2006, Mychal Bell was a football hero, and his hometown, Jena, Louisiana, loved him for it. As his high-school team posted its best season in six years, Bell scored 21 touchdowns, rushed for 1,006 yards, and was named player of the week three times by *The Jena Times*. The paper celebrated his triumphs in articles and photographs, including a dramatic one in which Bell, who's black, stiff-arms a white defender by clutching his face guard. ¶ But within weeks after the season's end, Bell was transformed into a villain, accused of knocking out a white student, Justin Barker, who was then beaten by a group of black students. The parish's white district attorney charged Bell and five others with attempted second-degree murder. Six months later—after the DA had reduced the charges against Bell—a white jury convicted him, as an adult, of aggravated second-degree battery, a crime that carried a possible 22-year prison sentence. By then, he, along with his co-defendants, had been transformed yet again: together, they'd been dubbed the Jena Six and had become icons of a 21st-century civil-rights movement.

That movement swelled through an electronic underground of blogs and black radio and Web sites, then burst into the national spotlight. On September 20, 2007, it culminated in a protest march that drew some 20,000 people to Jena, a town of roughly 3,000. The movement's grievance wasn't just the severe treatment of the Jena Six, but the light treatment of white youths who'd been in fights or hung nooses on a school tree—the "white tree"—after a black student asked if he could sit under it. Together, the galvanizing facts tapped into a larger ache: the record incarceration of African American males—the shift "from plantations to penitentiaries," as the Reverend Al Sharpton put it at the protest. All of the frustration at the disproportionate imprisonment of black men seemed to find its way to Jena, as if here, at last, in a small town's idea of justice, was an explanation. At home and around the world, the media found answers in the black-and-white clarity of *Race Hate in America*, as the British Broadcasting Corporation called an early documentary.

But soon the simple narrative began to fray. For every fact, a countervailing one emerged. Blacks had sometimes sat under the "white tree." Justin Barker had not been involved in the noose-hanging or in the interracial fights that had occurred over the weekend before he was attacked. Mychal Bell, described in news reports as an "honor student," turned out to have racked up, along with good grades, at least four previous juvenile offenses. He was said to be living with a white friend, suggesting that black-white relations in Jena were more complex than people assumed, and so on. Skeptics seized on each such revelation to argue that the case was more about black criminality than white racism—a manufactured racial drama à la Tawana Brawley (with Sharpton once again playing a role) or the Duke rape case.

Neither version was correct—and both were. The reality was complex enough that people could assemble a story line, buffet-style, to suit their outlook. The proliferation of media outlets made this even easier. New "facts" popped up everywhere. The Nationalist Movement, a white-supremacist ("pro-majority") group, ran interviews on its Web site with the victim and the town mayor, providing ammunition for those seeking to prove the town's racism. On MySpace, a picture appeared of one of the Jena Six posing with $100 bills coming out of his mouth, providing ammunition for those who said the families were milking the cause for money. Anonymous readers posted the arrest record of Mychal Bell's mother, and other allegations about the family, in an online forum of *The Town Talk*, a daily newspaper based in nearby Alexandria. It was Wikinews with no mechanism for achieving consensus on the truth—making it maybe the truest version of all.

Even as events refused to cohere into a sensible whole, activists, reporters, and participants kept trying to package them into a recognizable story line. Bell was used to affirm white racism or black thuggery, as two-dimensional as a Kara Walker silhouette but without the artist's irony. J. Reed Walters, the white district attorney, devolved into caricature, as did Jena itself. The pieces didn't add up to real people or a real place, and that argued for checking the math.

Along with football, church, and hunting, the most popular pastimes among young Jena residents include "looping"—driving up and back the length of the town, which sprawls along Highway 84 in central Louisiana. After a day or two in Jena, where I went a month after the marchers and other reporters had left, I took to looping myself, past Maw and Paw's and the Caboose Café, past Blade-N-Barrel and the town hall, past Papa Ron's Drive-Thru convenience store and Gracie's Hair and Tanning Salon, past church after church after

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church. As I did, I noticed that most of the areas where blacks live are outside the official town limits. As it turned out, all of the Jena Six lived outside of Jena.

I found Melissa Bell, the 38-year-old mother of Mychal Bell, in one such black neighborhood, "The Quarters," in the trailer she and her children have called home for the past four years. On an unseasonably cold day, she lay huddled beneath a blanket on her couch, with a space heater plugged in, the oven on and open, and four gas burners flaming blue into the darkness.

Until her son's arrest, Melissa Bell's life had been both prosaic and emblematic. Her father was imprisoned when she was 16. She graduated from Jena High and at 20, after half a year of college, gave birth to Mychal. She had a daughter and another son and by 23 was largely on her own with three children, working nights and relying on her mother's help. She and Mychal's father, Marcus Jones, were never a couple, Jones told me; and when Mychal was little, she took Jones to court for child support. In 2000, when Mychal was 10, Jones decamped for Dallas, returning only for intermittent visits until 2007, when he came to free the son he'd left behind. "He has not been there," said Anthony Jackson, a teacher at Jena High who is related to Marcus Jones. "The mother has had the responsibility of raising Mychal."

Melissa Bell worked a series of low-wage jobs—at a hospital, Burger Barn, Procter and Gamble—and had her own run-ins with the law, including a stream of bounced checks, for amounts as small as $4, in 2005. To her son, she was more friend than limit-setter, according to Mychal's best friend, John McPherson. And she was often at work. At 16, Bell was coming into manhood on his own. By the first semester of his junior year, he was spending most of his time with McPherson and his wife in their nearby trailer. McPherson, an oil-field worker, is white—a fact that defenders of the town have made much of—but for him, race was irrelevant. He bonded with Mychal over football and became a mentor to him. "I just knew he needed somebody to give him a break," says McPherson, who is now 20.

Given the poverty of Bell's background, the odds were against him: black men in Louisiana are five times as likely to go to prison as to college; in LaSalle Parish, they are incarcerated at twice their proportion in the population. But Bell's athletic gift gave him a shot at a college scholarship. He combined a knack for the game with the work ethic to make it look easy. After the team watched a game film together, Mychal would borrow it to study more. When opponents lined up, he knew exactly what they were going to run, Mack Fowler, his former coach, says: "He was like a coach on the field"—a leader. As a junior, Bell was already one of the 10 best players Fowler had seen in a 34-year career.

The erratic, and occasionally embarrassing, performance of Jena High's football team has never diminished the town's devotion. Schools love to play Jena because of its "gates"—so many townspeople turn out. The Wal-Mart Supercenter sells Jena Giants clothing, and local businesses sponsor the player of the week and plaster the playing field with ads, making the games profitable for the school, too. Bell was a draw, which helps explain why, when he began to get in trouble—to be trouble—so many adults looked the other way. Or as his father put it, "He couldn't have been too bad—I mean, y'all didn't prosecute him all this time here."

In the year leading up to the attack on Barker, Bell had punched a girl, physically assaulted a man, and committed two acts of vandalism—four offenses he was found guilty of in juvenile court. (His father called it "kid stuff" and complained about "Uncle Toms" running to whites at the courthouse.) Fowler, a jowly white man of 56 who says he was "like a granddaddy" to his players, told me of other incidents that he had heard about involving the crowd Bell ran with, which included some of the Jena Six. In the summer of 2006, for example, that crowd had attacked a black ex-convict who had himself once been feared in the neighborhood.

As a child, Bell was "scared of everything," his mother says—fire engines, police sirens. But as he grew up, his temper began to scare others. "He was hotheaded a lot—that was his only flaw, I believe," McPherson says, along with "hanging out with the wrong people." Bell also had a father who believed that no slight should go unanswered—that if you were in the right, as Jones put it, "you have the right to be a man."

Bell's volatility became evident in dramatic fashion when he assaulted a female student, LaTara Hart, on Christmas Day, 2005. She got in the middle of Bell's long-running dispute with her cousin, and ended up at the hospital with injuries—to her eye, jaw, and chest—that her family describes as more serious than Justin Barker's.

Like John McPherson, LaTara Hart has become ammunition in the information wars, used, in her case, by those seeking to prove that Bell was violent. She has no interest in playing that role, she said when I found her at her family's comfortable brick house on a weekend back from college. (While Hart had been anonymously, and inaccurately, described in Web accounts, this was the first time she had spoken on the record.) In a community so small that, as Marcus Jones puts it, "if you burp you can hear it all over town" (perhaps on the police scanners that many residents have in their homes), the families are connected: Jones was best man at LaTara's parents' wedding. Partly for that reason, the Harts did not press for anything more serious than probation and an apology. LaTara and her mother forgave Bell, although her father has not. (His initial reaction to Bell's arrest in the Barker case was "They ought to lock him up forever.") Anlynne Hart, like her daughter, joined the protests against the charging of the Jena Six, but she also believes the whole drama need never

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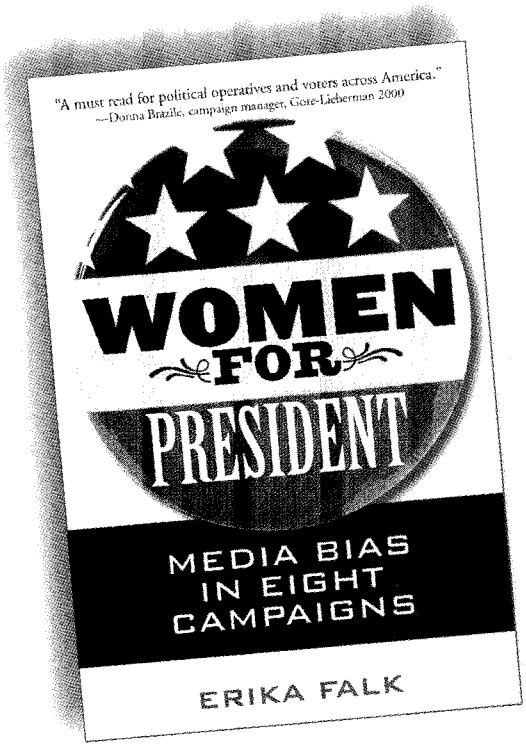

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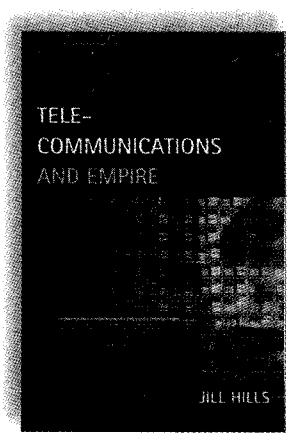

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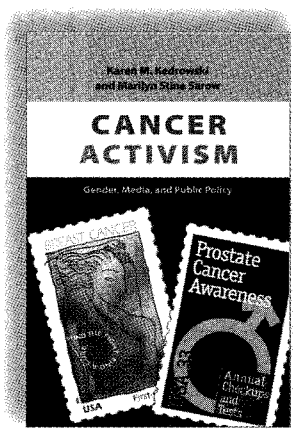

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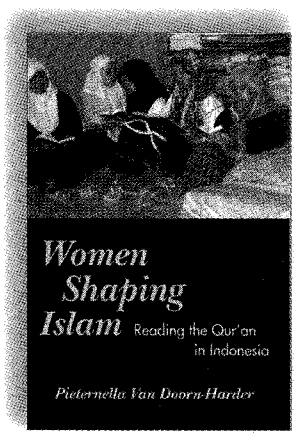

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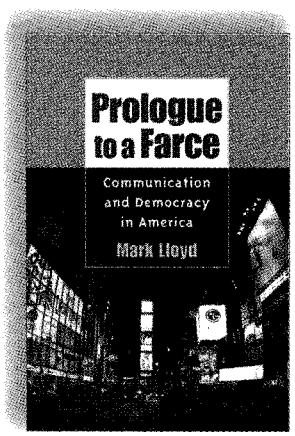

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The History of Communication

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have come to pass. "The boy had a history of getting in trouble," she says, and it should have been reckoned with. At the time he punched LaTara, he seemed to be going through something, "just butting heads" with everyone. The coaches and school officials had to know, she says, because other players told them: "They wanted the child to bring them their touchdowns—and that's not fair."

Bell's legal troubles never cost him a game. Nor did the problems he began to have in school during the fall of 2006, when his grade-point average, which had been above 3.0, slipped substantially. According to Fowler, Bell and another member of the Jena Six were written up so often that school officials asked the school board whether there was a policy on excessive infractions. There wasn't. The coach said that if necessary, Bell should be sent to an alternative school. He wasn't. The assistant principal was "sports-minded, you know, so he didn't want to disrupt," Fowler says. "And we finished 7 and 3 and barely missed the playoffs. But you look back and wonder—well. But [Bell] was never nothing but 'Yes sir, no sir' around us." Still, Fowler knew enough to warn Bell that if he didn't watch out, the streets would "whup" him and he would end up with nothing.

That Bell failed to heed that warning is perhaps understandable. As a football star, he seemed to have found the loophole in his father's lesson that a black man can't get a break. No wonder he didn't see that punching a white boy at school could change the rules. "This is Jena," Anlynne Hart says. "You had the judge and DA at those ball games Friday night, clapping them on—you see what I'm saying? And all this is going through the courts while they're clapping him on, running up and down the football field, and then the minute this happened to the white boy—it's like, uh-oh—click-click—he going to jail."

The district attorney, J. Reed Walters, does not know whether he ever saw Bell play, since he and his wife (who works for the school system) took a break from games after their sons graduated from Jena High. Nearly four decades earlier, Walters had played high-school football himself, in the nearby town of Olla, but he was no Mychal Bell. His aspirations lay elsewhere, in becoming a lawyer. He loves being a small-town prosecutor, and having never craved the spotlight, he feels only "puzzlement" at the global storm he generated. But thanks to the legal discretion that Louisiana grants its district attorneys, it is Walters's character, not any "Jim Crow" statute, that has shaped the course of Bell's case. That character, in turn, reflects in no small measure the character of his community.

Raised in Olla by a schoolteacher mother and a father who worked in the timber industry, Walters has spent most of his life in LaSalle Parish. As he entered adolescence, the parish, like many places across the South, was fighting a rear-guard action against school desegregation, a battle chronicled with unabashed bias in its newspaper. The first blacks didn't enter Jena High until 1969, 15 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*. The following year, the first black faces appeared in the football team photo; from what I could see, those players also integrated the pages of *The Jena Times*, which was owned and edited then, as now, by Sammy Franklin. A 1971 photo of Olla's high-school football team included Walters, then in 10th grade, and one black player. In that same issue, a columnist argued that just because "a Black man cannot work as well as can a White with ideas, symbols, numbers and the like," he was not inferior—just different.

Even as events refused to cohere into a sensible whole, activists, reporters, and participants kept trying to package them into a recognizable story line.

Over the next decades, Jena settled into its post-segregation identity. Blacks could walk in the front door of the Burger Barn, instead of going to a side window. Relations were cordial, barring a few incidents of white-on-black violence recounted with the horror of legend and occasional school fights stemming from interracial dating. Gas-and-oil exploration joined timber as a stalwart of the economy. Walters settled in Jena in 1981, after law school at Louisiana State University, and has never left. He raised his sons in a large house with a swimming pool on "Snob Hill," as Jena's wealthier section is called. He handled the routine cases of a small-town lawyer, and was also drafted into defending the poor. In fact, Walters's sense that he was winning too many cases for his indigent clients helped inspire his run for district attorney. "Walters Elected D.A., LaSalle Goes for Duke," reported *The Jena Times* on October 10, 1990. Sixty-eight percent of voters in LaSalle Parish had turned out, and 63 percent of them had voted for David Duke, the ex-Klansman, for U.S. senator, giving him one of his highest margins in the state. Walters won 51.6 percent of the vote—3,212 votes. By the time Mychal Bell turned 16, Walters had been reelected twice. By statute, he also advises the police jury (akin to a parish council), the school board, and the hospital. The lifelong son of the parish has become a town father.

A number of those town fathers—the police chief; Sammy Franklin of *The Jena Times*; Walters himself—

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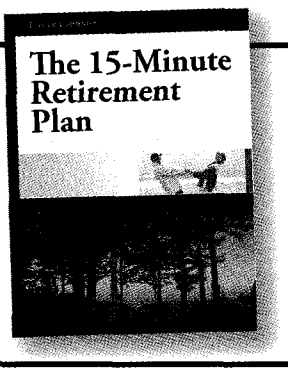

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attend the same church, Midway Baptist, which sits on Highway 84. Midway is among Jena's larger and more prosperous churches, and Walters is among its pillars. A licensed minister who pinch-hits for the preacher, he also sings (off-key, by his own admission) in the choir, heads its pastor-search committee, and teaches Bible study twice a week. Along with the small-town culture in which he was raised, Walters's Southern Baptist creed—his certainty of the path to eternal salvation—helps to explain him: in matters of faith, or law, he has the confidence of his convictions.

On the October Sunday morning when I visited, he began Bible study by taking attendance (six adults, including his wife) then turned to the Sermon on the Mount, explaining why Jesus had come to reconcile man to the law of God. Human beings who kept trying to bend the law to their convenience and desires needed an "attitude adjustment," he said, offering a modern example of bending the law: even though the speed limit is 55, we interpret it as 64 because that's what will trigger a ticket.

Walters believes time is "critically short" before the Second Coming, when everyone will have to stand before Jesus, and all must perfect themselves for that moment. He strives for that perfection—taking Jesus' injunction against tearing asunder "what God has joined" so literally, for example, that he frets about the prospect of ever having to pronounce divorces. He actually tries to drive 55. When I asked if he had ever made a mistake, he thought for a moment, then cited a 25-year-old case in which he had misread a report and failed to file a lawsuit in time.

Walters remained convinced that everything he did in the case of the Jena Six was "absolutely 100 percent correct—without question." Never mind that even some of Walters's white friends say he charged too severely, not least because the victim was able to attend a school function that night. Walters believed his decision to charge Bell as an adult with attempted murder reflects both the facts of the case, including Bell's history, and the values that his community holds dear—"conservative," "help-oriented," and "Christian." (I spotted a photocopy of the Ten Commandments hanging on the courthouse bulletin board, next to the bail-bondsman and paternity-testing ads.)

Walters says he does not look at race in his prosecutions. But that does not mean the racial boundaries of his community do not influence him. Whites outnumber blacks by 7-to-1 in the parish; beyond one black member apiece on the 10-member school board and on the 10-member police jury—both from a racially gerrymandered ward—no black has a position of power. There are four black teachers on a parish staff of 196. Black-owned businesses? Sammy Franklin could think of two: a car-detailer and a funeral home.

As for Walters himself, his world—like that of many white Americans—is white, as is most of his neighborhood. The restaurants he frequents rarely have black employees or black patrons. The worshippers at his church are white, as are the small-town-elite circles in which he moves. In 17 years, he says, he has never had a black employee, beyond some who helped him "privately." He offered as evidence of Jena's "perfect" race relations that the high school's white quarterback throws to both black and white players. The white kids who hung the nooses were of Walters's world—indeed, one of their families attends his church. Mychal Bell was, in essence, a stranger.

That reality was not lost on Jena's black residents, including Mychal Bell's mother. She told me a story about going to pick up Mychal's grades in 2006, before he "got locked up." Mychal had been failing math, and the teacher was regularly sending him to the principal's office for clowning around and sleeping. As Bell stood in line, she says, she watched the teacher, who was white, embrace and smile at Jena's better-off whites, even as she greeted black and lower-class white parents much less warmly. Bell confronted her: "I said, 'You ain't got no business being around black kids, because you don't even want to teach them. You just showed your cards right here: everyone you knew—everyone you knew who got money—they was all good with you.'"

The teacher, Kim Franklin, happens to be married to Craig Franklin, the assistant editor and heir apparent of *The Jena Times*, which has presented uncritically Walters's account of the events. (In an op-ed for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Craig Franklin dismissed the entire affair as journalistic malfeasance, calling Jena a place "where friends are friends regardless of race.") Kim Franklin says she has always treated all of her students the same, and she and Melissa Bell clearly don't like each other. But their polarized perceptions, as much as the legal encounter between Walters and Bell, seemed to capture the competing truths of the Jena saga: Bell's denial of her son's responsibility, and the town's denial of its racial cliquishness. The white residents' loving solicitousness toward their own was subtler than crude racism—which Jena also had—but no less powerful. It reflected a conception of "separate but equal" communities that ultimately weren't equal at all. Witness the town's selectively fluid geography: even as black areas have remained unincorporated—unable to vote for mayor or police chief, ineligible for town services like garbage collection—in 2005 Jena annexed a new subdivision to the north of "Snob Hill."

On September 20, for a span of hours, Jena's demography inverted: suddenly, the protesters against the status quo outnumbered its defenders by at least 6-to-1. But although the protesters passed right over the town lines, they didn't take up the cause of moving them. For all its noise, the Jena Six movement lacked a clear sense of where to apply its force. It probably

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helped reduce the charges against the boys, although Walters denies that public pressure swayed him. Vigorous defense lawyering got Bell's conviction as an adult overturned earlier that month. And it's unlikely that, at least in Jena, public officials will treat noose-hanging lightly in the future. But so much else was left untouched. The protesters didn't press to improve the parish's indigent-defense system, poor even by the standards of Louisiana; didn't ask why two schools in the southern part of the parish are still effectively segregated, providing an escape valve for white Jena parents who wish to avoid sending their children to integrated schools; and didn't talk about the habitual-offender law Walters used to send a peer of Bell's father to the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola for life for three nonviolent offenses. "We will not stop marching until justice runs down like waters," Jesse Jackson said. But the Jena Six movement seemed like a mighty flood that left bent and broken twigs in its wake—and the contours of the riverbanks unchanged.

Less surprising is that the movement avoided the other side of Mychal Bell's story: his own choices, for starters, or the link between the generational disintegration of black families and black incarceration. The lip service about not excusing Bell's past or the boys' attack on Barker didn't diminish the hagiography, which climaxed in a standing ovation for two of the Jena Six when they appeared as presenters at the Black Entertainment Television awards (dressed in hip-hop gear, which coach Fowler says they never wore in Jena).

Anlynne Hart, the mother of Bell's earlier victim, says his parents should have acknowledged his history up front and declared that he deserved help in spite of it. But would such a movement have grown around an icon with a tragic flaw? There is a reason we tell these stories as we do. On Melissa Bell's wall hung a commendatory plaque from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization Martin Luther King Jr. co-founded and led. Simply by mothering Mychal and standing by him, she became a heroine of this civil-rights movement, an elevation that perhaps spoke more to its character than to hers.

On the gray day when I met Melissa Bell, her mood was as dismal as the weather. Her son's future seemed unpredictable. His conviction in the Justin Barker case had been overturned on the grounds that he shouldn't have been tried as an adult, but he faced retrial as a juvenile. He had come home in September after more than nine months in prison—then been returned to custody two weeks later because of his previous juvenile offenses. He had missed Christmas and his birthday and at least one U.S. Army National Combine game, a national forum where high-school players show their stuff. He was, even at that moment, missing his senior season of football, and all the promise that had portended.

One weekend last year, Marcus Jones drove north from Jena to visit his son in prison. He was excited: a recruitment letter for Bell had come from LSU, whose football team is revered here.

"Now *this* is the college," he told Mychal, handing him the letter. He realized his mistake only with his son's rueful reaction: "Oh Lord, that was a dream right there."

Instead of a bright future, as Jones had initially thought, the letter evidenced only how much Bell had thrown away—or had had taken from him, depending on whose version you believed. From then on, Jones said, when Bell asked whether other letters had come, his mother lied and said no.

But in December, Bell's forecast changed. Days before his trial was scheduled to start, he and Walters made a deal: Bell pleaded guilty to second-degree battery, a misdemeanor; acknowledged in open court that he had punched Barker; and agreed to testify against his co-defendants should they go to trial. He was sentenced to 18 months, including time served, which means he should be out by summer. Even as both sides claimed victory of a sort, it was hard to escape the sense that they had fought to an exhausted draw.

Under the terms of the deal, Bell will be admitted into a high school yet to be determined, which means he could be playing football again by fall. He now has a second chance at that LSU scholarship—to the extent, that is, that he ever had a chance at all.

As it turns out, Fowler, Bell's former coach, didn't think Bell would make it to LSU, as he told me when we met in October. The rain was beating through the pine thicket around his home, and dark had fallen early. His cat, Fancy, nestled on his belly. Fowler, who spent his life in sports and education, had retired prematurely at the end of the school year, his spirit broken in part by the jailing of Bell and two other players who were part of the Jena Six. He struck me as wanting to unburden himself—even if doing so exposed his own clay feet.

As talented and versatile as Bell was, Fowler said, at 5 feet 9 inches or so, and maybe 190 pounds, he probably wasn't big enough for LSU, and likely could have played only for a Division II or a small Division I school. Those prized recruitment letters? Fowler, like every other coach, put his best players' names out; the schools then blanketed prospects with pro forma letters of interest. "I'm gonna tell you, these colleges, they send 1,000 a day," Fowler said. Until the college recruiters look at game film, they can't say whether they're truly interested or not.

Bell and the other players didn't know that, and Fowler and the other coaches didn't tell them. During the off-season, the letters helped propel the kids through the tedium of running and lifting weights—keeping them working, so their high-school teams could keep on winning.

Amy Waldman is an *Atlantic* national correspondent.

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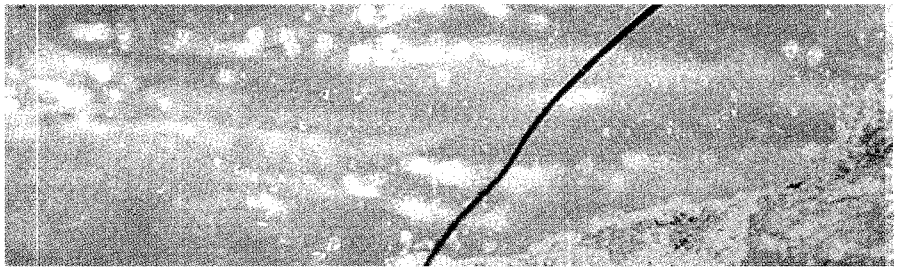

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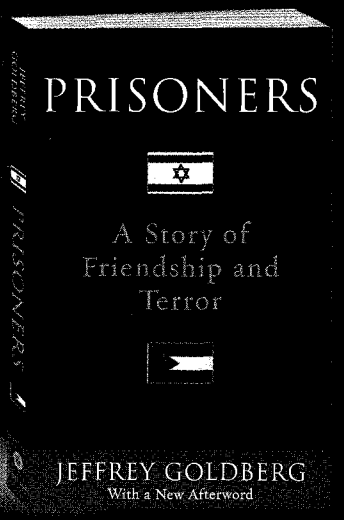

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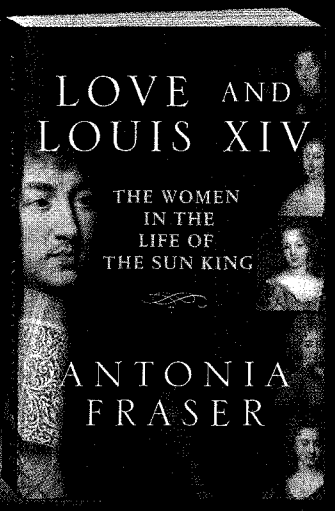

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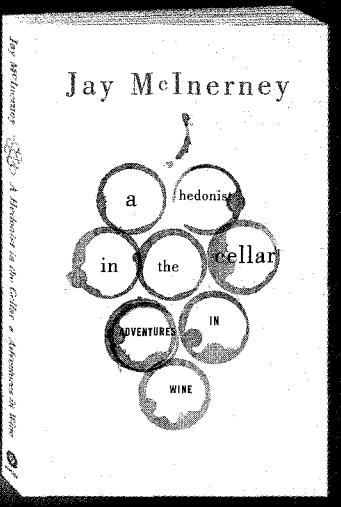

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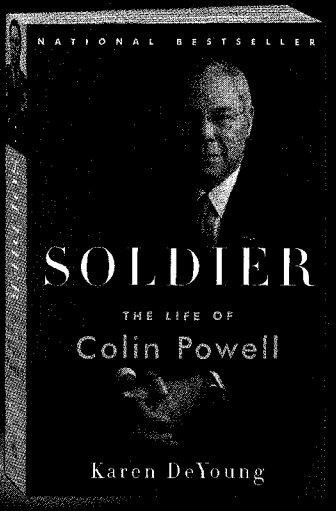

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BOOKS

Editor's Choice: How Dior's and Balenciaga's competing visions of style and women revived high fashion

Couture Clash

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

On an icy mid-morning in February 1947, after seven seedy years of privation and shame, Paris and its most important industry came exuberantly back to life. In what remains the most famous fashion show in history, the new House of Dior presented its inaugural collection in its Louis XVI salon. In steady tempo, model after model swirled in dresses and suits in neutrals and luscious colors with tight bodices and wasp waists, their long, profligately full, elaborately pleated skirts scattering the audience's cigarette ashes as they flared open. Adopting the silhouette and requiring the intricate dressmaking art—and layers of underpinnings—of the Belle Epoch, the "New Look," as Carmel Snow, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, dubbed it on the spot, was in fact a defiant anachronism. But fashion instantly and effortlessly changed direction: the New York buyers who'd left for home before Dior's launch had to turn around and sail back to France to put in their orders ("It took one swish of the hips and America was won," the writer Colette said). More important, as several new books elliptically show, the New Look ushered in haute couture's waning but most glorious era, even as Dior's triumph—winsome and lovely in itself—helped take fashion and femininity down what has proved to be a pernicious path toward the frivolous and jejune.

BALENCIAGA'S
blouse-back suit, 1955

BALENCIAGA PARIS, THAMES & HUDSON

The new edition of Marie-France Pochna's intelligently illustrated, thorough 1993 biography, **Christian Dior**, draws heavily on the designer's own memoirs to elucidate two contradictory facets of his short career (he died just 10 years after the debut of the New Look): his almost religious dedication to nurturing the then already antiquated craft of Parisian dressmaking; and his revolutionary creation of an international luxury-goods empire comprising lucrative licensing, a global chain of boutiques, and ready-to-wear lines. In Dior's formula, both facets depended on media attention, which he secured through regular, often nonsensical changes in the direction of his designs. Dior generated the once-popular fixation with ever-changing hemlines, and each year, as his fellow couturier Hubert de Givenchy explained, the market demanded a "new New Look, because his styles became too quickly too Seventh Avenue."

Paradoxically, this media-stoked fripery revived haute couture, an essentially 18th-century industry whose products were made inch by inch by a mighty force of cutters, seamstresses, embroiderers, and other hand workers skilled in the production of buttons and ribbon and in the application of beads, paillettes, and pearls (two out of five French workers were employed in dressmaking and allied trades in the mid-1950s). A single dress could take 200 hours to make; a couture house's seasonal collection could take more than 100,000 hours. Couture was nearly equally labor-intensive for the customer: in one season Barbara Hutton

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ordered from Balenciaga 19 dresses, six suits, three coats, and a negligee, each of which required at least three lengthy and intricate fittings. An art form, the most finely wrought expression of femininity ever devised, and a vital if obscenely inefficient source of national pride and foreign exchange (in 1949, two years after its first collection, the House of Dior accounted for a full 5 percent of France's export sales, mostly with exquisite handmade dresses), couture reached its apogee in the postwar years—even as its participants and devotees knew it to be doomed.

This poignant and brilliant flowering was probed in a highly touted exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum this fall and in the text-heavy, exceptionally pretty, intelligent, and well-written companion volume, **The Golden Age of Couture**. Although the book occasionally looks askance at the excesses and legacy of Dior, it insists that he was the era's defining force (the period it covers, 1947 to 1957, spans his entire career in couture; cognoscenti will notice that its white cover with gold lettering and pearl-gray ribbon bookmark match the colors of the original interior of the Maison Dior). Thus it all but ignores the other design houses that characterized couture's renaissance, including that of Coco Chanel, who made her famously triumphant comeback in 1954, and those quintessentially Parisian houses Balmain and Lanvin.

The one figure given equal treatment is Cristóbal Balenciaga, whom Dior, as generous as he was self-promoting, acknowledged as "the Master of us all." Aloof and ascetic, Balenciaga (1895–1972) shunned the publicity, commercial deals, and social whirl Dior depended on, refusing to be photographed by the press and granting only one interview, three years after his retirement. Repeatedly offered a fortune to develop a prêt à porter line, he invariably answered: "I shall never prostitute my art." A man once rumored not to exist, he can never be the subject of the kind of chatty, conventional biography Pochna has written of Dior. But his oeuvre has been covered in a number of books, most discerningly by Lesley Ellis Miller and by Marie-Andrée Jouve and her co-author Jacqueline Demornex.

NEW LOOK–INSPIRED coats by Hardy Amies and Edward Molyneux, modeled by Wenda Rogerson and Barbara Goalen, 1949

Balenciaga Paris, published in late 2006 to coincide with an exhibition at the Louvre, mines the House of Balenciaga's archives year by year, collection by collection. It affords the most rigorous, richly detailed examination of the evolution of the couturier's lines.

Balenciaga's seamstress mother taught him to sew at 3, and he was apprenticed to a tailor at 12. Strongly influenced by English tailoring—its marriage of ease and refinement, and its stress on precise cutting—he was, with his incredibly nimble fingers, the prime craftsman of his collections, each of which included a dress made entirely by him. He alone, according to Chanel, was "a couturier in the truest sense." She added, "Only he is capable of cutting material, assembling a creation and sewing it by hand. The others are simply fashion designers."

Dior, a charming if exceedingly plain-looking dilettante, came to couture late and by chance through his skill as a draftsman. Whereas a joshing glamour characterized the atmosphere at the House of Dior, silence and intense concentration governed the House of Balenciaga. "It was like entering a convent of nuns drawn from the aristocracy," Marie-Louise Bousquet, the Paris editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, remembered. It's often facilely argued that Dior's and Balenciaga's strikingly different styles—the former fanciful, the latter austere—sprang from the designers' opposing temperaments. It would be more accurate to say that the differences emerged from their opposing approaches to their craft. For Dior, the dress evolved from sketches; for Balenciaga, it evolved from the fabric (an indifferent sketcher, he would often design by draping cloth over his models' bodies). Dior made the fabric conform to his vision, by having his workrooms stiffen, line, and back the cloth using the traditional methods of dressmaking; Balenciaga's innovations in cutting techniques allowed him to respect the fabric's inherent qualities.

Most important, behind the differences in their conceptions of design lay profound differences in their conceptions of women. An intensely romantic and nostalgic vision of femininity impelled Dior's New Look. But that Platonic ideal required a notorious if finely crafted armature—padded hips, underwire bustiers, horsehair petticoats, girdles,

THE GOLDEN AGE OF COUTURE, V&A/ABRAMS

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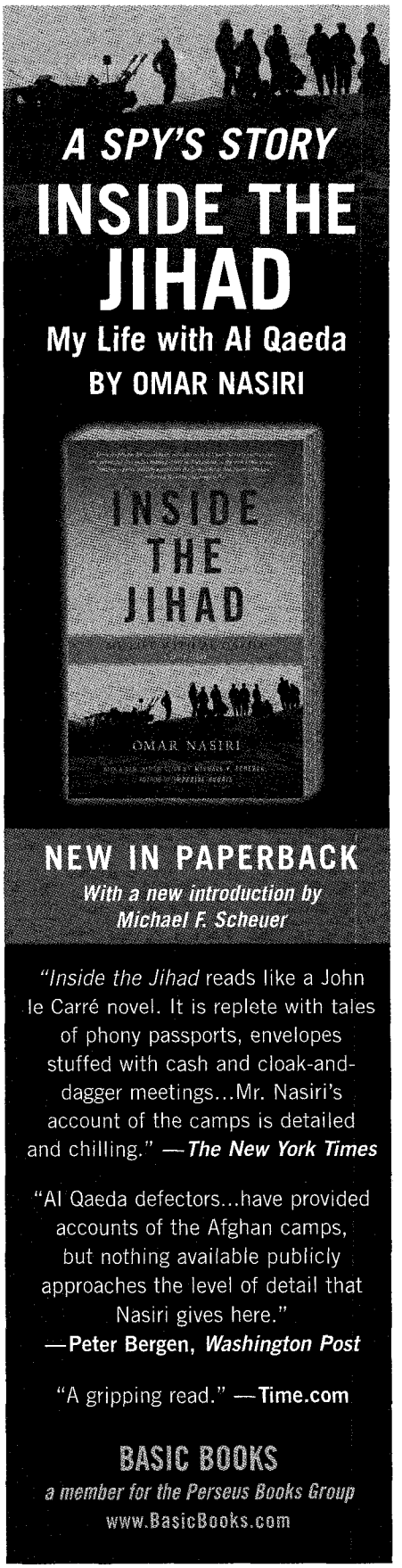
and built-in corsetry. To achieve the pretty, youthful "new softness," women reshaped their bodies to fit the requirements of the dress. One model told Snow: "It is the most amazing dress I have ever seen. I can't walk, eat, or even sit down." In contrast, one of Balenciaga's "absolute pronouncements," as Givenchy recalls in an essay in the recently published collection **Balenciaga and His Legacy**, was "The dress follows the woman's body; it's not the woman's body that follows the dress." He designed for a time and a society in which young women strove to look 20 years older, a time that valued attributes that came only after 35: a sense of style and an intelligent beauty dependent on what the great fashion writer Kennedy Fraser called "a kind of nerve-end understanding that life is often very sad." His garments, in their legendary range of grays, browns, and blacks, and influenced by the clean lines of ecclesiastical dress, were supremely beautiful, never pretty. They weren't for the undeveloped, for they projected assertiveness, authority, and sexuality. His streamlined styles—the tunic, the chemise, the empire—flattered both the svelte and those with curves and a stomach ("M. Balenciaga *likes* a little stomach," one of his fitters famously said), since they overlooked the waist. With wit and a graceful, vaguely exotic convex line, his elegant, superlatively comfortable "semi-fitted" suit—his most-imitated creation—banished Dior's wasp waist. His shift barely skimmed a woman's body; his barrel dress enveloped it. His skirts, usually somewhat gathered into the waistband at the front, accommodated no-longer-flat stomachs. What Yves Saint Laurent defined as "the ease of Balenciaga" was based on what was universally recognized to be his unrivaled knowledge of the female body ("he builds clothes for the Woman, not for the Headlines," Snow wrote)—a fact that makes his clothes deeply erotic, especially for the woman wearing them.

The Dior who emerges from Pochna's chronicle and from *The Golden Age of Couture* is at worst a winning operator and at best a delightful genius of commerce with an eye for pretty things. By all accounts, Balenciaga—severe, uncompromising, taciturn—is couture's Soup Nazi. As his friend and *Vogue*'s fashion editor, the high-born and high-minded Bettina Ballard, wrote, "His life is his work ... It rarely seems to give him a sense of fulfillment, as it never reaches the perfection he desires." For all his Gallic charm, Dior had no interest in women, the cynosure of his career. He was interested in publicity, and so hired only young, beautiful models. Balenciaga's art emerged from his sympathy with women. He knew, for instance, that he had three generations of women to dress, and so always had some older models. Ernestine Carter, fashion editor of *The Times* of London, was spot-on in her evocation of his favorite model and the muse for many of his early masterpieces, the notoriously unpleasant Colette (not the writer): "her Dracula walk, her big head low like a bull ready to charge, her shoulders hunched down, ... and a look of almost violent hatred on her face." She wouldn't have fit in at the House of Dior, where woman was ornament, but she was extremely useful to Balenciaga's customers: "Any woman could wear Colette's clothes—one of those tricks of proportion." No woman was Dior's muse. He simply kept up a stir, and so his creations from collection to collection have an untethered and empty quality.

By contrast, as *Balenciaga Paris* shows, Balenciaga developed a line over time, and returned to and refined an idea. "Make it new" would have been anathema to him; the assemblage contains no gimmicks to surprise or impress customers or the press, but there is a progression that somewhat gives the lie to Balenciaga's much-commented-upon "timelessness." Gradually, as form increasingly follows function, his shapes become cleaner, purer, more severe. By 1968, the year he abruptly retired, this archtraditionalist (he was a lifelong practicing Catholic and probably a monarchist to boot) seems to have embraced a modernist—or is it a monastic?—aesthetic.

Benjamin Schwarz is *The Atlantic*'s literary editor and national editor.



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BOOKS

Katie Couric's long day's journey into evening

A Woman's Place

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

In the fall of 1979, I headed off to college with mixed feelings and new stuff: a Brother typewriter, a hot pot, and a portable black-and-white television. On the typewriter I wrote a "psychological evaluation" of the main character of *Manchild in the Promised Land*, with the hot pot I made cream-of-chicken Cup-O-Soup, and on the television I watched the *Today* show.

Going away to college was overwhelming and depressing, principally because I was a homebody who had never before experienced institutional living and who despised it on contact. I had requested to live on a co-ed floor, and consequently the lounge was always trashed, the music was always loud, and the RA, who was supposed to provide some sort of governance, was a notorious pothead who could barely be pried away from his bong to lead a midnight fire drill, let alone to fill out a maintenance request form when one of the bon vivants vomited in the hallway or jammed the elevators. The force that kept me from turning tail and enrolling in community college was the *Today* show—or more precisely, Dorothy Meaney, my roommate.

KATIE: THE REAL STORY
by Edward Klein
Crown

"Great!" she said when I unpacked the TV set. "I just love Jane Pauley." And soon, so did I. I loved Jane and Tom Brokaw, and I developed a particular fondness for quiet John Palmer, who read the news. With time, it became possible to love Willard Scott, and eventually—out of loyalty to Dorothy—I came to terms with Gene Shalit, although even at 17 I understood that his was not a cultivated taste. Before long, I had rented us a mini-fridge, and we began skipping the dining-hall breakfasts so that we could have cold cereal and Taster's Choice in our room and enjoy the *Today* show uninterrupted. Homesick, each morning I would wake up with an anxious feeling, and each morning—with the first,

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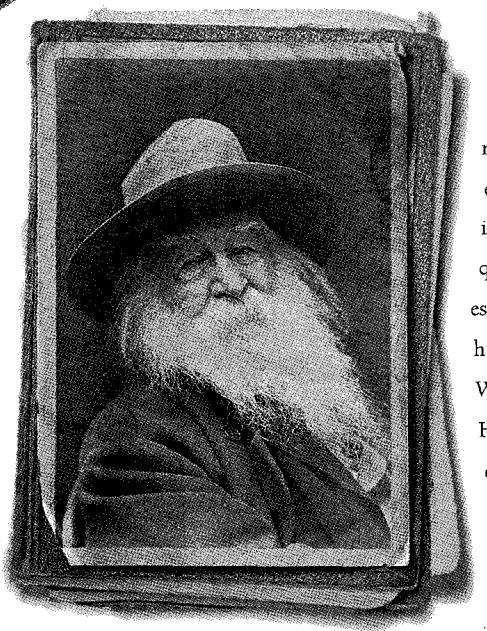
Why some people think Walt Whitman makes chocolate candy.



Whitman satisfied his sweet tooth with rich, wave-like verse. Every kid should make poetry a part of his diet.

KIDS DON'T GET ENOUGH ART THESE DAYS. So it's no wonder that some of them mistake America's most revolutionary poet for a box of chocolates.

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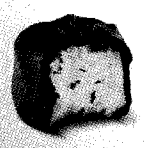

Too much of Whitman's art won't give you a stomachache.

Throughout his career, Whitman rewrote and reinvented *Leaves of Grass*, expanding and editing it in an effort to publish his quintessential collection. In essence, *Leaves of Grass* was Walt himself in verse form. Walt Whitman changed poetry. His life's work was ahead of its time. And though he lived long before the Summer of Love, he was the original beatnik — an inspiring example for writers like Ginsberg and Kerouac.

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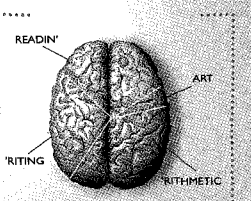

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triumphant bars of the old theme song—the anxiety would begin to fade.

The *Today* show didn't remind me of my own home, but it was about "home," and that was almost as good—in some respects, even better. Morning after morning, in the studio that seemed to me like a cheery New York apartment, with its living-room furniture and kitchen, and following a format (news, weather, segment, segment, repeat) as inflexible and calming as a morning in elementary school, Jane and Tom learned how to cook things, how to budget for a family of four, how to choose a vacuum cleaner. They sipped mugs of coffee, they complained in a good-natured way about the early hour, and ever so rarely they—Jane more than Tom—let slip something about their personal lives. They evinced a fondness for each other that was too unalloyed to be marital, too sexless to be romantic, and too intimate to be purely professional. Steadfast, uncomplicated in their allegiances, they were foursquare on the side of the American experience as it revealed itself in corn-husking competitions and Fourth of July parades and Thanksgiving preparations. They were educated without being intellectual, possessed a narrow range of well-modulated emotions, and day by day transmitted—through the mystery of telecommunications—a secret message intended just for me: defy your parents and major in education instead of English. They understood and were not ashamed of the part of me that embarrassed my parents: my squareness.

In return, I watched them faithfully—although *watch*, I realize, is the wrong verb where this phenomenally successful program is concerned; anyone who fails to grasp this fact will never understand why the *Today* show will survive the death of nightly news, the death of the newspaper, and even the collapse of television as a major player in the media world. The *Today* show, like life itself, unfolds while you're doing other things. If my adult life were to be presented as one long series of mornings, you would see me growing older in a series of vignettes: puttering around the dorm room with Dorothy, tugging on panty hose for my first real job, making breakfast for an overnight guest, gazing out the windows of a hundred hotel rooms, bouncing a cranky baby on my hip, sitting on the edge of the bed and reading over the eulogy I would deliver at my mother's funeral, handing lunch boxes to waiting children, fielding telephone calls about overdue page proofs and missing permission slips—and always, always, off to the side, there would be a television, and on it, keeping me company, distracting me from myself, making me feel that my somewhat disorganized private life was taking place within the reassuring structure of something larger and better, would be the *Today* show.

> The loneliness of at-home motherhood—the loneliness for adults, for the adult way of life—makes the hosts of the *Today* show crucial.

Being "yourself" on television is hard for all sorts of reasons, and the *Today* show makes the task particularly difficult, because it is a program about the home, produced for the homebound, but anchored, perforce, by a group of driven Manhattan professionals who have elected to spend very few of their waking hours at home. Furthermore, they bring to the job some level of journalistic experience—or at least of newsroom savvy—that they must lock away in a secret place when they are interviewing, straight-faced, some "expert" on back-to-school shopping or family scrapbooking. Among the men who have held the job over the past two decades, no one has been better than Matt Lauer, who confines his considerable wit—which is fast and often barbed—to his hosting banter, never applying it to noncelebrities, whom he treats generously and with the same sense of slowly dawning wonder that marked Bill Moyers's conversations with Joseph Campbell. ("So, I guess what you're saying, Emily—and correct me if I'm wrong—is that sometimes it's better for kids to have a little bit of chocolate milk at lunchtime, if the alternative is ... *no milk at all*?") And among the women, no one has been, or probably ever will be, as precisely suited as Katie Couric.

She arrived just as the *Today* show family had briefly and disastrously revealed its true self: not a family at all, but a group of careerists who pretended to be fond of one another the way that Robin Williams pretended to be Mork. Bryant Gumbel, who was then co-hosting with Jane, had written a memo—leaked to the press—deriding Willard Scott's buffoonery and Gene Shalit's mediocrity. Then he, and the show's management, became smitten with a toothsome glamazon named Deborah Norville, who began chewing through *Today* show cast members like salted peanuts. First, John Palmer was sent packing, and then she took a fancy to the seat next to Bryant's: the next thing you knew, Jane Pauley, with her sensible turtlenecks, plaid jumpers, and slept-on hairdos, was out on the street. A significant portion of the once-loyal audience, including yours truly, jumped ship. (My *Good Morning America* interlude with Joan Lunden—not so bad, really.) Live by the sword, die by the sword. Deborah was pushed out more rudely than Jane had been, and we began to trickle back, to take a look at the person they'd hired to make things right: Katherine ("I still can't decide whether I'm Katherine or Katie!" she said 10 seconds into her first broadcast) Couric.

What an odd little creature Katie was, considering the high expectations placed upon her: plain, chirpy, and not only pregnant but sporting a Dorothy Hamill wedge, the tonsorial equivalent of a vow of chastity. She was capable and upbeat, but apparently no more than that, and Bryant underestimated her. He tossed her the lightweight stories on parenting and homemaking,

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evidently unaware that he was allowing her to forge a link with the show's core demographic. And Katie was playing a terrific hand: she was much smarter—and much tougher—than she looked. She consistently over-delivered on interviews with newsmakers and, immersed as she was in the intensity of new motherhood and the demands of a skyrocketing career, she saw firsthand the stirrings of what would be the biggest lifestyle story of her generation: work-life balance.

And then, during one of my particularly intense spates of viewership (I was heavily pregnant, with twins), a friend of mine called and asked, "Did you hear about Katie Couric?" No, what? "Her husband died—of cancer." In that shocked instant—I'd seen her on the show the day before; she'd seemed perfectly cheerful—my attitude toward Katie changed: I no longer saw her as merely a television host, but as a new mother in the midst of a ghastly situation. I knew, of course, that she had two little girls, and so even the lightest lifestyle segments she did after returning from her bereavement had a heavy context. Stories on sippy cups and chicken nuggets and tummy aches took on a new dimension: quiet bravery and cheerfulness as performance. For me, deep in my postpartum funk, the *Today* show reached a new level of authenticity: being at home with small children (the subtext of every episode ever broadcast) turned out to blend a gentle, happy routine with a persistent melancholy that had to be forcibly conquered through intense, manufactured interest in playpen recalls and triumph-of-the-human-spirit stories.

The *Today* show creates a bond with its overwhelmingly female viewers because so many of them watch it, as I did, during one of the most psychologically complex and lonely—and most emotionally fulfilling—times of their lives: their tenure as mothers to small children. Indeed, one reason the show is so successful and profitable is that long ago its producers realized that American households follow a rhythm: early in the morning, there is a great bustling of activity as the working members of families propel

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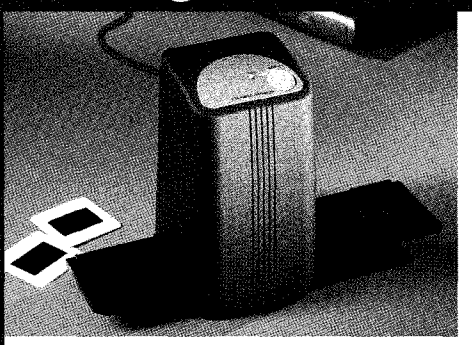

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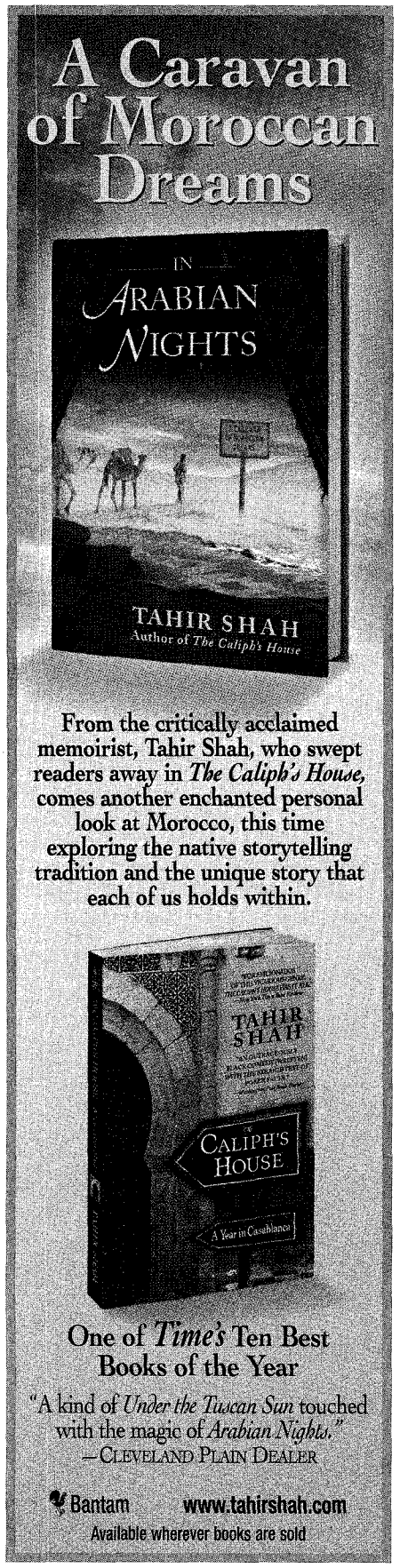

themselves out of the cocoon and into the cold world of commerce and adult preoccupation, and then there is a quiet settling down, once the cars have backed out of the driveways and the neighborhoods have been drained of their breadwinners. This is a delicate moment for any mother who spends her days home with children: on the one hand, the number of household residents who feel they own a piece of her has just diminished; on the other hand, she's been left behind with the babies and the pets.

It is into this emotional void that the *Today* show's second hour comes to the rescue, trumpets blaring: out go the first hour's reports on war and politics and economic trends, and in come pieces on family and shopping and decorating. "The men are gone," the show seems to tell us. "Now we can talk about the things we love": the exact way to sneak vegetables into the diet of a finicky toddler, the trick to putting aside a little money for a family treat, the essential components of a first-aid kit for the car—all the minutiae of running a household, presented without irony or scorn by hugely compensated media celebrities. It is the loneliness of at-home motherhood—the loneliness for other adults, for the adult way of life, for the work clothes and schedules and employment itself—that makes the hosts of the *Today* show crucial. When you turn on the program, there they are: your friends. You half-listen to them, the way you half-listen to your children playing on the floor in the next room, and together the two worlds make up the whole of your enterprise: theory and practice. The host discusses shoes that are supposed to help toddlers walk more steadily, and you turn to your own baby and wonder if you ought to buy him a pair. The *Today* show pours into the house through the kitchen-counter television or the bedroom television (because the main TV, the big one, is tuned to *Arthur* or *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, and you're half-watching those shows as well), and it is different from other shows. When it is on, the television screen is no longer a barrier separating real life from TV land; the television screen is a window into another room of the house, the one where the grown-ups are.

The signal aspect of Katie's on-air personality—her unthreatening chumminess, her giggling girlishness—was perfectly suited to this essential part of the role: Katie was all the friends you left behind at work. She was commiseration and office pranks and flirting. It's true that as more time passed after her husband's death, she began to change in surprising ways, beginning with her appearance. Slowly, slowly, slowly—and then all at once—the Fantastic Sams/Casual Corner look was gone, and in its place was a version of New York sophistication marked by short skirts and complicated shoes. It was as though she'd gone backward through the familiar process that had taken Diane Sawyer, her rival, from pageant queen to journalist.

> No woman needs to storm the Bastille of network news, because the form has become irrelevant.

Her new, post-grief self also took on dimensions that were off-putting. I thought it was wonderful when she fell in love with Tom Werner, a quiet and educated man several years her senior who was also a stratospherically successful television producer; he seemed like someone who would protect her, someone who wouldn't feel threatened by her celebrity. When they arrived at the Four Seasons in Manhattan one afternoon for a tryst, someone tipped off the tabloids, and the picture of Katie, mortified but undeterred, stepping past the photographers and into the hotel lobby (and then emerging a while later, her lover holding an umbrella for her in the rain) seemed

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romantic and lovely. The images lent themselves to a narrative: she had gone to work at the *Today* show, spent a few hours in the ecstasy and luxury of hotel-room sex with a besotted millionaire, and then returned home to have dinner with her children. I imagined that they would marry, and the story of her broken family would end happily. But the relationship foundered, and her other boyfriends seemed horrible—a plastic surgeon, a very young scion of a loaded family, a trumpeter so green and gormless he looked stunned and nervous sitting next to her. She began to socialize with her personal trainer, a grizzled cupcake who rejoiced in the moniker "High Voltage," and who seemed to love nothing more than squeezing herself into something sparkly and hitting the town with her famous client. And Katie's social schedule, which apparently involved a punishing whirl of society benefits and flashy launch parties, seemed hollow when the alternative would have been spending those evenings at home with her girls.

As Katie evolved into a less likable personality, she remained as compelling as ever. If anything, her on-camera skills improved. You couldn't take your eyes off her. She would tear into hard-news interviews, and then wheel around and discuss microwave cuisine in a credibly excited way. Her newfound combination of personal, professional, sexual, and Nielsen power would have led anyone in her position to wonder: Shouldn't I take some big next step? Act III: Catastrophe.

You're not really a huge power broker of the female variety until some bitchy man writes a nasty biography of you, a literary pap smear meant at once to diagnose and humiliate. Edward Klein, the sort of writer who prefers a book-jacket photo to show him nuzzling a tough-looking canine, would seem the man for the job. Like his earlier book about Hillary Clinton, and like Christopher Byron's book on Martha Stewart and Jerry Oppenheimer's book on Barbara Walters, Klein's *Katie: The Real Story* proceeds from the notion that of all the forces responsible for his subject's protean success, the least significant is actual talent. According to this logic, the star's fortunes depend entirely on how "nice" her female fans believe her to be; the idea that these famous women might have some expertise or ability of greater value to viewers than the mere force of their apparent pleasantness seems never to occur to these writers.

Klein's book on Couric is not terrible nor even entirely mean-spirited, but its garbage heap of rumors—borne to us by unnamed sources who claim firsthand knowledge of everything from her sexual inclinations to her behavior while her husband was dying—lend the enterprise a stink. On the record, Klein has interviewed every pea-green supernumerary he could get his hands on for a damning quote. ("She was a lowly frigging VJ," grumbles some former news gal you've never heard of, about the way Katie vaulted past her years ago.) His attitude toward sexual congress outside of marriage is more severe than the Vatican's, and that Katie did not arrive at her wedding bed a virgin—and indeed may have slept with co-workers—has him in a swivet. We learn that people at the *Today* show took bets on how long it would take Katie to use her husband's death to her professional advantage—a revelation that, if true, reveals nothing about Katie and quite a bit about her co-workers, and that should shock only those readers who believe the Manhattan media world to be composed of sensitive human beings bound to one another by common cause and fellow feeling.

For the first two-thirds of the volume, the reader mentally defends Katie—and hopes neither of her daughters ever comes across this vile book, which maligns their dead father and belittles their mother's work on behalf of other sufferers of the disease that killed him. But then I was pulled up short by the final section, in which Klein delivers an accurate and devastating assessment of Katie's trials in the anchor's chair at CBS.

Katie's fond memories of watching Walter Cronkite every night with her father surely drew her to the job. Despite her liberal politics, Katie has a reactionary

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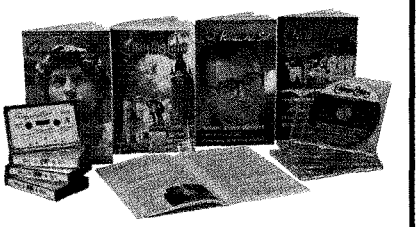

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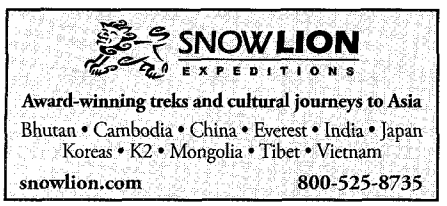

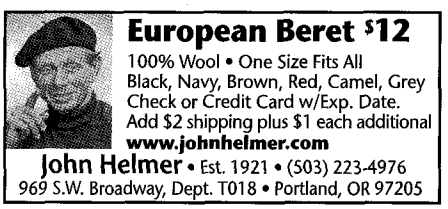

approach to television, as manifested in her worshipful interviews of first ladies (Nancy Reagan in particular) and boosterish embrace of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, which she used to host for NBC. And at CBS, she has embraced the Cronkite myth, inviting him to record the show's introduction that plays at the beginning of each broadcast.

Of course, the show has been a turkey since the night a year and a half ago when that sound bite first played. Sexism was the obvious, first choice for culprit, and in a way, that's probably what it was. The president of CBS News, Sean McManus, said that the network had perhaps underestimated that response: "There is a percentage of people out there that probably prefers not to get their news from a woman." As everyone acknowledges, the old folks and aging Boomers who tune in at 6:30 for a half hour of headlines and human-interest stories aren't looking for the news, but a performance of the news. (Bob Schieffer was more successful than Katie, not in spite of looking like one of the old guys down at the VA, but because of it.) Choosing an anchor isn't a journalistic decision; it's a casting choice. And this one was abysmal. Flop sweat and panic surrounded the broadcast almost immediately. In a move typical of television, the first things the bosses tried to change about Katie were the very things that had led them to hire her: the bubbly personality, the killer clothes, the playfulness. Now she had to sit quietly at her desk like a girl being punished. She acquired a passel of one-color blazers that looked like rejects from last year's Thrifty Rent-a-Car collection. By now, she has all but disappeared. When Les Moonves, the head of the network, adamantly denies any talk of replacing Katie—"This is a long-term commitment"—what he means is that he thinks of little else. Furthermore—and this is how the big boys play the game—no matter how poor Katie's ratings become, CBS has still deprived NBC of her talent, which it had used richly and well, on everything from Olympic coverage to *Dateline NBC*. Perhaps Katie could swallow her pride and move to the CBS morning show? Think again: that program is hosted by a forgettable little beauty named Julie Chen, who happens to be married to ... Les Moonves.

Moonves brought you not only *CSI* but *Survivor*. In other words, he creates franchises, not stars. And he hired Katie based on the assumption that she had a huge and adoring fan base that would follow her anywhere. But by definition, the kind of person who has time on her hands in the morning—who has nothing *but* time, time that must be filled, endured, killed—is the kind of person who is in a race against the clock by early evening. At nine o'clock in the morning, Katie was the personification of the *Today* show in its perfected form: not just a television program, but a cheery marker of time, a blessed imposition of structure and order on the disquieting entropy of life at home with children. But at 6:30 in the evening, she's a drag. She's just one more person who wants something from you. You stand in the kitchen and your 9-year-old tells you he needs an egg carton for a school project, and your 6-year-old is upending the cat's bowl, and your husband timidly asks when dinner might be ready, and from somewhere by the blender, Katie is nagging you to be interested—really, really interested—in Anbar province. You'd think only a man would enter a scene as tense and overwrought as the dinner rush and decide that his best contribution to the woman at the heart of it would be to offer a relaxed assessment of the Iraqi civil war.

That Katie has bombed at CBS is a testament, not to the existence of a glass ceiling, but to the fact that real revolutions are so thoroughgoing that they don't just provide a new answer, they change the very questions being asked. Katie's mandate to lure women and young people to the nightly news was in itself ridiculous and doomed to fail—and a goal beneath her talent and ambitions. No woman needs to storm the Bastille of nightly news, because the form has become irrelevant: Oprah has immeasurably more cultural, commercial, and political clout than Charles Gibson and

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Brian Williams, and no young person is ever going to make appointment TV out of a sober-minded 6:30 wrap-up of stories he or she already read online in the afternoon. Because Katie remembered the old world, the one in which the most-respected news was broadcast at the end of the day, she thought that she was taking a more powerful job. But the *Today* show—broadcast for four hours a day, a forum for interviews with many of the top newsmakers of the day, as well as for the kind of lifestyle-trend stories it pioneered and that have come to play such a big part in the nightly news—is a far more culturally significant program. One reason that this huge star didn't have a tell-all biography written about her until now is that while she was at *Today*, no publisher wanted to antagonize her; a booking on the show was every new author's dream. The release of Klein's splashy book, then, is evidence not of Katie's elevation, but of its opposite. She made the kind of mistake that women a generation younger than hers probably wouldn't have. She spent her time gunning for a position that had been drained of its status and importance long before she got there. And what she has learned, the hard way, is that her climb to the top has been not a triumph but the act of someone who slept through a revolution.

Like Katie, I have moved on from the *Today* show. My boys are in school now; I write full-time. I still turn it on for a few minutes each morning, when I'm making coffee or avoiding work. It's as pleasant as it ever was, but it will never have the urgency it held for me when Katie was there, because I will never again be the mother of small children—abruptly cast adrift from the routines of adult life, cloistered, lonely. I met Katie Couric once, and although she was very nice to me, I was disappointed. We sat on chairs under studio lights and talked, and I hope she didn't guess what I really wanted to tell her: once, you were my closest friend.

Caitlin Flanagan is the author of *To Hell With All That* (2006). She is at work on *Girl Land*, a book about the emotional life of pubescent girls.

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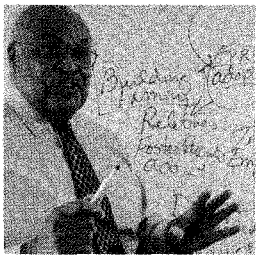

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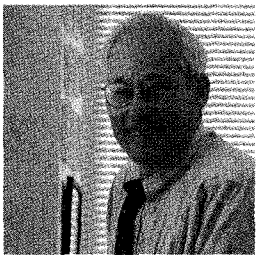

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BOOKS

Paul Scott's Raj Quartet reveals how sex doomed the British Empire.

Victoria's Secret

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

There are not as many theories about the fall of the British Empire as there once were about the eclipse of its Roman predecessor, but one of the micro theories has always appealed to me more than any of the macro explanations. And it concerns India. For the first century or so of British dominion over the subcontinent, the men of the East India Company more or less took their chances. They made and lost reputations, and established or overthrew regional domains, and their massive speculations led to gain or ruin or (as in the instance of Warren Hastings) both. Meanwhile, they were encouraged to pick up the custom of the country, acquire a bit of the lingo, and develop a taste for "native" food, but—this in a bit of a whisper—be very careful about the local women. Things in that sensitive quarter could be arranged, but only with the most exquisite discretion.

Thus the British developed a sort of modus vivendi that lasted until the trauma of 1857: the first Indian armed insurrection (still known as "the Mutiny" because it occurred among those the British had themselves trained and organized). Then came the stern rectitude of direct rule from London, replacing the improvised jollities and deal-making of "John Company," as the old racket had come to be affectionately known. And in the wake of this came the dreaded memsahib: the wife and companion and helpmeet of the officer, the district commissioner, the civil servant, and the judge. She was unlikely to tolerate the pretty housemaid or the indulgent cook. Worse, she was herself in need of protection against even a misdirected or insolent native glance. To protect white womanhood, the British erected a wall between themselves and those they ruled. They marked off cantonments, rigidly inscribing them on the map. They built country clubs and Anglican churches where ladies could go, under strict escort, and be unmolested. They invented a telling term—*chi-chi*—to

THE RAJ QUARTET:
The Jewel in the Crown,
The Day of the Scorpion,
The Towers of Silence,
A Division of the Spoils
by Paul Scott
Everyman's Library

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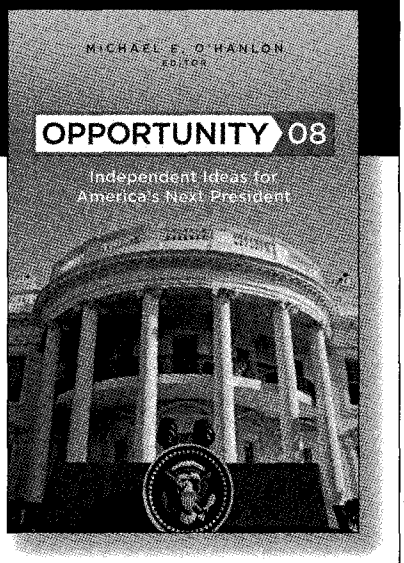

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define, and to explain away, the number of children and indeed adults who looked as if they might have had English fathers and Indian mothers or (even more troubling) the reverse. Gradually, the British withdrew into a private and costive and repressed universe where eventually they could say, as the angry policeman Ronald Merrick does in *The Day of the Scorpion*, the second volume of Paul Scott's Raj Quartet: "We don't rule this country any more. We preside over it."

In this anecdotal theory, the decline of the British Raj can be attributed to the subtle influence of the female, to the male need to protect her (and thus fence her in), and to the related male need to fight for her honor and to punish with exceptional severity anybody who seems to impugn it. And so we may note with interest that it took one English homosexual, and one English bisexual, to unravel the erotic ambiguities of empire. "After all," says the district collector Turton in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, "it's our women who make everything more difficult out here." And Paul Scott accepted that he had little choice but to follow the track that Forster had laid down.

I choose the word *track* with care, since the railway network was (apart from Lord Macaulay's education system) the most enduring achievement of the British Raj: the most proudly flourished emblem of the unity and punctuality it brought to the nation, as well as the speediest possible method of annexing Indian capital and shipping it to the ports of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta in order to fuel the English Industrial Revolution. The Indian railways feature by name in *Bhowani Junction*, one of the most gripping of John Masters's Anglo-Indian novels, and their imagery appears to have oppressed Paul Scott. According to Scott's brilliant biographer Hilary Spurling, whose introduction to this handsome two-volume Everyman edition is a jewel in itself, Scott felt that "Forster loomed over literary India like a train terminus beyond which no other novelist could be permitted to travel by the critics." When Scott deliberately chose a rape as his central event—as it had been in Forster's *Passage*—we can see that he ultimately resolved to face the comparison and attempt to transcend it. To borrow the language of "cultural studies," he did so by exploring the interactions of race, class, and gender, as Orwell had tried to do in *Burmese Days*, while not forgetting the politics.

> To protect white womanhood, the British erected a wall between themselves and those they ruled.

In the last of Scott's tetralogy (*A Division of the Spoils*), we meet a certain Captain Purvis, who represents the new, brusque British postwar consensus about India, namely that it was and is

> "a wasted asset, a place irrevocably ruined by the interaction of a conservative and tradition-bound population and an indolent bone-headed and utterly uneducated administration, an elitist bureaucracy so out of touch with the social and economic thinking of even just the past hundred years that you honestly wonder where they've come from ... The most sensible thing for us to do is get rid of it fast to the first bidder before it becomes an intolerable burden."

This no doubt partly represents Scott's own view, or the view he took as a liberal-minded young officer watching the scenery being dismantled after the defeat of Japan and before the division of the spoils into India and Pakistan. It was obviously high time for the British to leave. Yet there is one last train to be caught, the one stopped in the desert in 1947 by a Hindu mob, who drag a Muslim from the carriage and do him to death beside the tracks. The train resumes its journey, bearing its complement of

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British officials away from the distressing scene. Sergeant Guy Perron, who has listened to Purvis's rational rant and who has quarrels of his own with the authorities (and whom I think we are to see as the Scott figure in the story), is hit hard as he watches the former rulers make good their escape, and finds something unpleasantly "greasy and evasive" in the snaking movement of the train that carries them away. The ensuing awful bloodbath of partition took place principally at the railway stations and on the trains, but by then the British could claim that they had washed their hands rather than stained them.

Scott's work on India, which is really a quintet given the coda *Staying On*, is tense and beautiful in a way that Forster's is not, because it understands that Fabian utilitarianism has its limits, too. The novels also possess a dimension of historical irony, because they understand that the British stayed too long *and* left too soon. The date on which it became evident that the game was up is a date that every Indian still knows: April 13, 1919. Maddened by a report of a mob attack on (yes, it had to be) an Englishwoman, Brigadier General Reginald Dyer ordered his soldiers to fire into a crowd in the public square in the northern city of Amritsar. That event was the Boston Massacre or the Lexington and Concord of the Indian revolution. From then on, it was a matter not of whether the British would quit, but of when. Scott understands this so well that he makes the name of that Amritsar square—*Jallianwallah*—a totem that recurs throughout the books.

But there remains a question of, if you like, etiquette. How exactly *do* you behave when you want to leave and know you have to leave but don't want to do so in an unseemly rush? Moreover, how do you conduct yourself when Japanese imperialism makes a sudden bid for mastery in Asia, which means that British rule will be succeeded not by English-trained Indian democrats and liberals, but by Hirohito's Co-Prosperity Sphere? These are difficulties that Forster never

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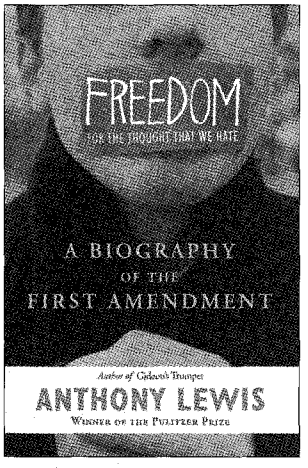

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had to confront. (The Amritsar events took place years after the visit to India that inspired his landmark novel.) Scott's account begins at the precise moment, in 1942, when the British have made the grotesque mistake of declaring war on India's behalf, without consultation, and when Mahatma Gandhi has announced that they must "quit India" and leave her "to god or to anarchy" (in the circumstances of growing Hindu-Muslim fratricide, something of a false antithesis). Depressed by Gandhi's failure to take the Japanese threat seriously, the old missionary lady Edwina Crane removes his picture from her wall, revealing:

> The upright oblong patch of paler distemper, all that was left to Miss Crane of the Mahatma's spectacled, smiling image, the image of a man she had put her faith in which she had now transferred to Mr Nehru and Mr Rajagopalachari who obviously understood the different degrees of tyranny men could exercise and, if there had to be a preference, probably preferred to live a while longer with the imperial degree in order not only to avoid submitting to but to resist the totalitarian.

And of course it is Miss Crane, trying to help, who is viciously manhandled by the rioters. And of course it is Daphne Manners, the gawky girl who defies convention so much as to have an affair with an Indian boy, who is gang-raped during the same disorders. Adela Quested in *A Passage to India* is making up her hysterical allegation about what happened in the Marabar caves, but Daphne is so eager to shield her genuine Indian lover that she refuses to testify about the real rapists who came upon them when they were lying together. And the boyfriend, who is charged with the rape and sent to prison, is himself sexually assaulted by Ronald Merrick during the course of his interrogation. Forster never dared attempt this level of complexity, or indeed of realism.

The ramifications of a small but cruel injustice allow Scott to test the whole fabric of decaying British India. Gradually, we come to understand that the British have betrayed their own promise—

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of impartial, unifying, and modernizing administration—and are resorting to divide-and-rule tactics. These are best described by Daphne's boyfriend, Hari Kumar, who notices

> the extent to which the English now seem to depend upon the divisions in Indian political opinion perpetuating their own rule at least until after the war ... They prefer Muslims to Hindus (because of the closer affinity that exists between God and Allah than exists between God and the Brahma), are constitutionally predisposed to Indian princes, emotionally affected by the thought of untouchables, and mad keen about the peasants who look on any Raj as God.

Poor Daphne, less political and more intuitive, sees where things have gone wrong in a different way:

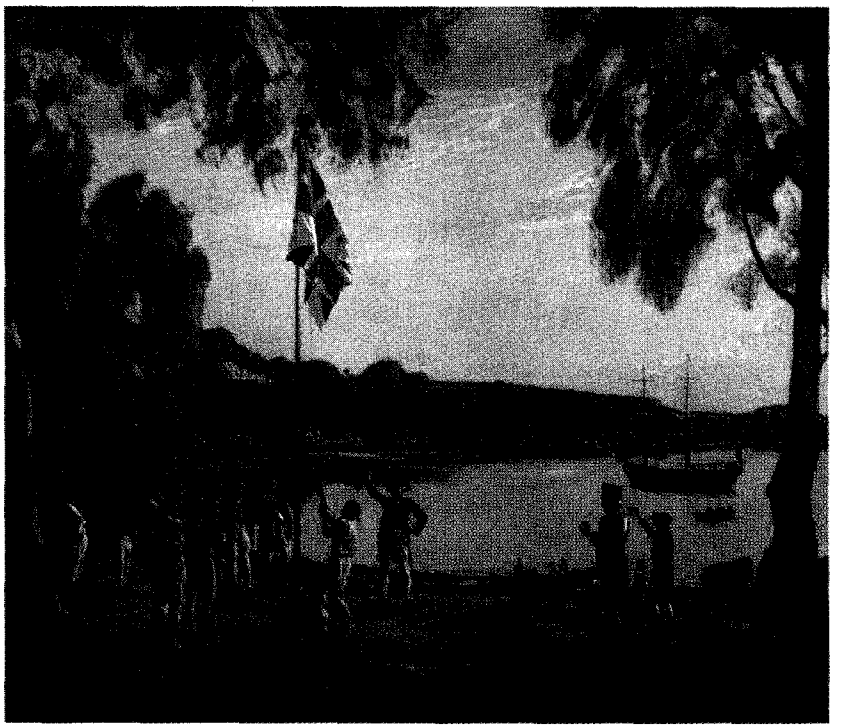
> Perhaps at one time there was a moral as well as a physical force at work. But the moral thing had gone sour. Has gone sour. Our faces reflect the sourness. The women look worse than the men because consciousness of physical superiority is unnatural to us. A white man in India can feel physically superior without unsexing himself. But what happens to a woman if she tells herself that ninety-nine per cent of the men she sees are not men at all, but creatures of an inferior species whose color is their main distinguishing mark?

Daphne's great-aunt, Lady Ethel Manners, the widow of a former governor, is outraged by Lord Mountbatten's hasty agreement to partition:

> The creation of Pakistan is our crowning failure. I can't bear it ... Our only justification for two hundred years of power was unification. But we've divided one composite nation into two.

The Raj Quartet, as these excerpts help to make plain, is not so much about India as it is about the British. To understand how they betrayed their own mission in the subcontinent is to understand, in Scott's words, how "in Ranpur, and in places like Ranpur, the British came to the end of themselves as they were."

Christopher Hitchens is an *Atlantic* contributing editor and a *Vanity Fair* columnist.



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BOOKS

A historian's education in the ways of empire

The Imperial Mind

BY PAUL KENNEDY

My first glimpse of the British Empire was an entirely favorable one. At some time during my seven years of purgatory at St. Cuthbert's Grammar School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, our history teacher gave us Arthur Grimble's **A Pattern of Islands**. Here was a fond reminiscence of a young man who, immediately after his Cambridge education, had been dispatched as an administrative officer to some of Britain's territories in the Southwest Pacific. His account included no Gandhian protesters, no disgruntled Afrikaners, no Egyptian nationalists, no Arab-Zionist street fights. Instead, Grimble's little gunboat took him from island to island, where he sat at immense tables stacked with suckling pig and yams, listening to the chiefs and elders as they made their reports.

Cooped up in a working-class row house on Tyneside in the 1950s, I wondered if I might someday pass the Colonial Office exam and end up doing the same as Grimble. Alas, by the time I reached college (1963), almost all of that distant empire had become independent. By that time, too, I had stumbled into a very different account of the servants of empire—the writings of George Orwell, another man who had been steered into a position of vast administrative responsibility at a young age. Orwell was a district officer in Burma in the Indian Imperial Police, which he hated. His abhorrence of one people's having dominion over another—tempered by his admiration for the imperial soldier and the administrator's tough-minded sense of duty—lasted until the end of his life. That loathing (which

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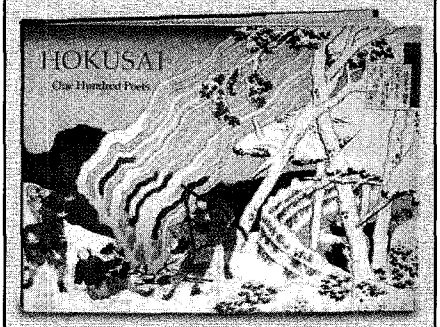

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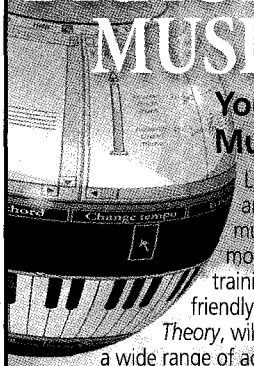

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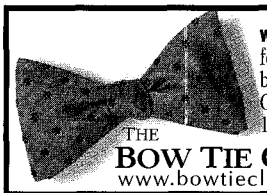

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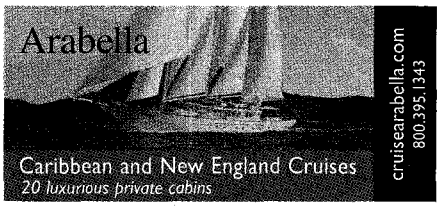

contained a fair amount of self-loathing) oozes through his early novel **Burmese Days** and through his essay "Shooting an Elephant," both of which revealed to me the ways that imperialism could brutalize both the rulers and the ruled.

Robert Irving's sunnier yet elegiac **Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker, and Imperial Delhi** tells the wondrous story of how, when the British announced their 1911 decision to transfer the Indian capital from Calcutta to a grand escarpment outside Delhi (i.e., "New" Delhi), the famed architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were employed to produce a completely new complex of classical edifices. Their ambitious plan reflected a confidence in the longevity of the empire that was both unrealistic and fast-fading. But even today, when one takes a taxi from the noises and smells of Old Delhi, through what used to be called the All-India War Memorial Arch, and up the long hill to what was called the Viceroy's House, the ambition and vigor that drove this design to its arch-regal completion are staggering.

Such a mix of beauty and vitality leads one to ask just who ran this worldwide empire of dominions, colonies, distant protectorates, and coaling stations, and why? Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher's now-classic **Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism**, a work of remarkable verve and style, provided one answer to that difficult question. Forget about the sinister city bankers, the flag-waving press lords, the jingoistic masses. The real movers and shakers, argue Robinson and Gallagher, were government ministers and high officials. These select white males, the "official mind" of the book's subtitle, were concerned above all else with preserving the grand 18th-century empire (especially India) they had inherited from their predecessors, and so qualified as "negative" or reluctant imperialists. They swallowed up Africa, not in a fit of Darwinian vainglory or in pursuit of gold or of (pace Lenin and Hobson) new markets, but simply to protect the strategic routes to the East. The straightforward unsentimentality of

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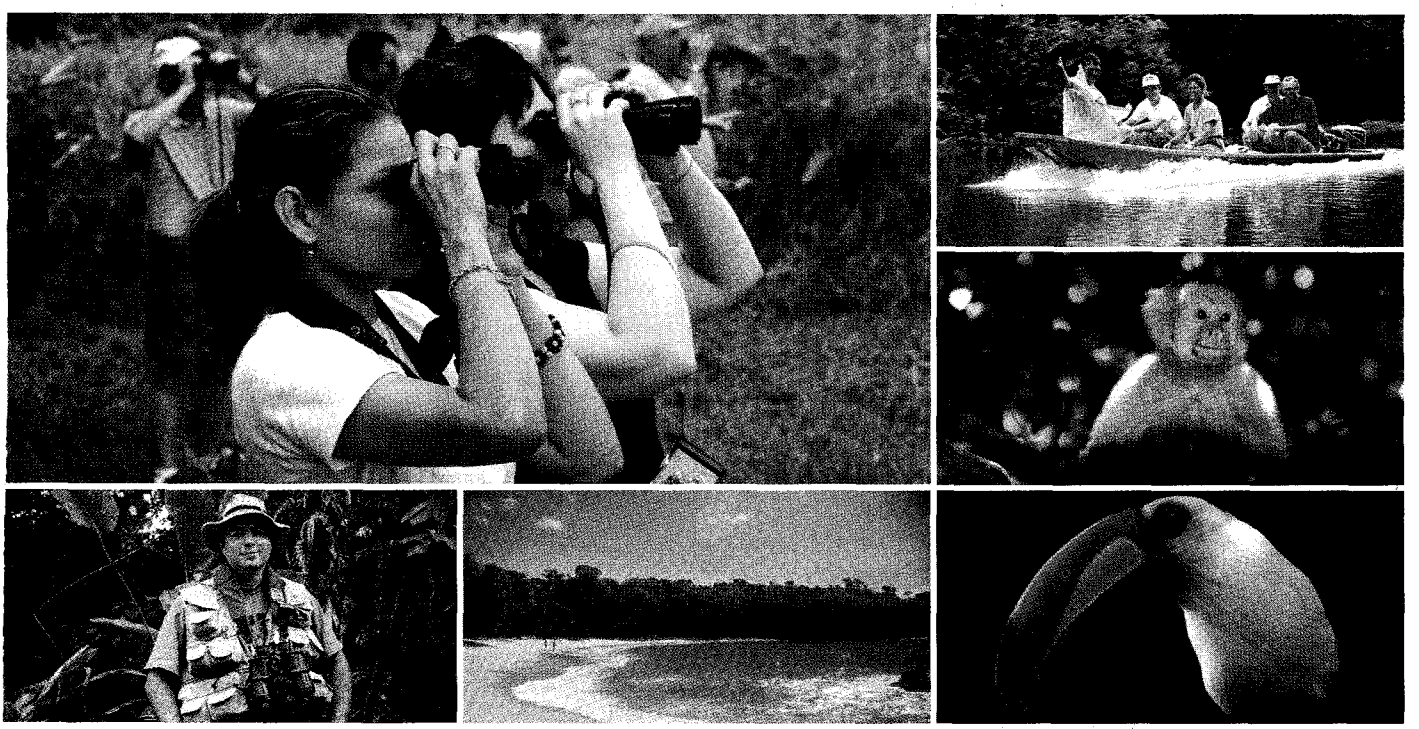

lockwise starting top left: Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge; Tortuguero Park Canal Cruise; White Faced Monkey; Keel Billed Toucan; Manuel Antonio Park; Rainforest Hike

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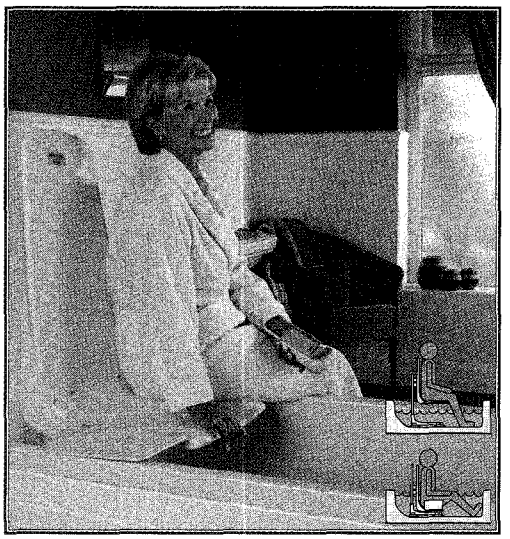
Innovative Safety Technology

Are you missing the luxury of warm, relaxing baths? Well, grab your towel!

By John Fleming

For many of us, nothing is more relaxing than a long, luxurious bath. Unfortunately, because of safety concerns, many people, particularly older people, have to forego this simple pleasure. Sure, you can spend big bucks to remodel your bathroom to provide a bathtub you can use, but who wants to do that? Now there's a better way, and it lets you use the bath that's in your home today.



Questions about the Archimedes Bath Lift?
Try our pre-recorded
Bath Lift Toll-Free Hotline
1-866-254-4716

If you or a loved one has given up bathing because of age, mobility or safety concerns, the Archimedes Bath Lift is the answer. It is so simple, you'll wonder why no one thought of it earlier. The battery-operated "chair" safely and steadily lowers you to the bottom of the tub, and when you're done bathing, it gently raises you back to the top of the tub assuring a comfortable and safe exit from the tub. The remote is fully waterproof, so your bath won't be a "shocking" experience.

This innovative chair recharges overnight (don't worry, if there's not enough power stored for a full lower/raise cycle, it will not operate), features an easy-to-use hand control, and is designed for comfort and support. It's lightweight (less than 25 pounds assembled), and easily portable.It features a wide seat and high backrest for maximum comfort and support.

Rediscover the simple pleasure of a warm, relaxing bath with our exclusive home trial. Try the Archimedes Bath Lift for up to 90 days, and if you are not completely satisfied, simply return it for a refund of the product purchase price.* Call today.

Enjoy your bath again without the risk of slipping
- *Fully waterproof remote*
- *Charges overnight*
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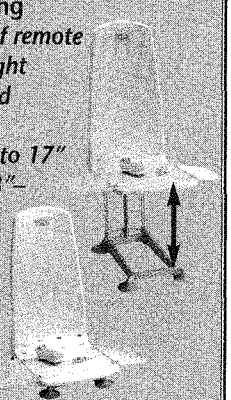
- *Chair raises up to 17" and lowers to 3"– or anywhere in between*
- *Transfer flaps for added stability*
- *High backrest, and wide seat*



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this book turned Marxist interpretations upside down, which continues to exasperate the race-gender crowd: If dead white males were the center of attention, what meager place was left for the history of the powerless, the oppressed, and the second sex?

Because they focus on the official mind, Robinson and Gallagher dismiss the public voice of British imperialism, and unnecessarily so. The great storytellers of empire influenced both contemporary and future generations of would-be district officers like myself. But perhaps we putative imperialists read their books too simplistically. That's the message of Alan Sandison's **The Wheel of Empire**, which looks at the works of the four greatest novelists of imperial themes—Kipling, Buchan, Conrad, and Haggard. Sandison argues that these writers weren't swaggering expansionists, but rather anxious soothsayers, predicting all that could go wrong as the 19th century gave way to the 20th. They feared the breaking-down of the old order and the new voices of emotion and disruption (Nietzsche, Treitschke, Freud, the navy leagues, the Harmsworth press, the social Darwinists, the socialists). If you read their works carefully, Sandison argues, you come to understand that these writers emphasized honor and duty and steadfastness not to advance empire, but to preserve order in a fatefully flawed world. Under the thin crust of civilization, Buchan noted, the primal forces were muttering and assembling. To deter their dread efforts, it was vital that young Britons maintain the ramparts. That those ramparts would fall only underscores the delicacy and difficulty of the task.

After reading and thinking about the empire for 40 years, I think it silly either to denounce or to rejoice in its existence. The empire happened. A small island state off the northwest shores of Europe ran a quarter of the globe for hundreds of years. This was no small thing. And it demands close study.

Paul Kennedy is a professor of history and the director of international security studies at Yale University. He is the author or editor of 17 books, including *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1988).

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ANDREW SULLIVAN MATTHEW YGLESIAS ROSS DOUTHAT MEGAN McARDLE MARC AMBINDER JAMES FALLOWS

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ANDREW SULLIVAN
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On Politics

"It's healthy to have an actual debate about foreign policy and conservatism. And I don't buy Ross's idea that the fundamental divide is between realists and idealists ..."

MATTHEW YGLESIAS

The Liberal Voice

"Indeed, my sense is that conservatives mostly regarded Clinton's misconduct in this regard as a kind of synecdoche (or maybe metonymy—sorry, Mr. Glassman!) for a failed presidency ..."

ROSS DOUTHAT

The Conservative Voice

"My sense is that the only people who were all that surprised by the Monica Lewinsky scandal were Clintonista liberals ..."

MEGAN McARDLE

On Economics

"I understand that nearly all politicians believe that government expenditures are the acme of human achievement. Nonetheless, passing a budget seems like a rather low standard for gauging success in Iraq ..."

MARC AMBINDER

The 2008 Election

Fred Thompson's official campaign kick-off was high-tech, low-key, and well-produced. His speech, a sober disquisition on the country's perilous times in the context of Thompson's own record, was certainly not purchased from the deli ..."

JAMES FALLOWS

On Asia

"India and China are so fundamentally different in so many ways that it is amazing that Americans often talk about them as a twinned pair ..."

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BOOKS

A guide to additional releases

COVER to COVER

BIOGRAPHY *and* MEMOIR

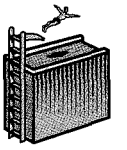
Being Prez:
The Life and Music of Lester Young
by Dave Gelly (Oxford)
An innovative musician, accompanist extraordinaire, and proto-modern hipster, Lester Young remains a lesser light in the jazz firmament. Some of the reasons are obvious: although he dressed with conspicuous cool, he chose a spotlight-shunning artistic trajectory (he's best known as a sideman, for Billie Holiday, Count Basie, and others), and he was shy, subtle, and sensitive—traits not usually associated with world-beating. Fortunately, Gelly puts everything in its proper place. Tracing an odd life and elusive legacy with exactitude, the British critic (and saxophonist) writes with a rare reserve—a concision and perception, really—that his subject would have appreciated. In so doing, Gelly shows his own modernist stripes: playing only the right notes, embracing contextual space, emphasizing the song above all else.

Nureyev: The Life
by Julie Kavanagh (Pantheon)
Anyone who's read Julie Kavanagh's dance criticism or her intuitive biography of the great British choreographer Frederick Ashton won't be surprised at her ability to evoke the balletic artistry and physicality of Rudolf Nureyev. But the mercurial Russian superstar presents her with a much wilder character and a liberated libido far removed from Ashton's closeted loucheness. Kavanagh proves as adept at writing about the netherworld of Manhattan's leather sex temples, the Mineshaft and the Anvil, as about the rehearsal rooms and stages of Covent Garden. Never prurient, she has her biographical priorities straight, and so, in a way, she tells us, did Nureyev. "To Rudolf," she writes, "sex was sex, and only dance warranted any form of consecration. 'Stage is a cathedral,' he once said, and morning class was his rite of purification." Artistically this was undoubtedly true, for he remained a spellbinding performer for decades despite all the carousing painstakingly documented here. Sadly, however, that carousing undoubtedly led to his death from AIDS at 54, when he was apparently on the verge of beginning a new career as a conductor. Brilliantly analytical but consistently stylish and knowing, this is among the most satisfying biographies of the year.

Margaret Fuller:
An American Romantic Life:
The Public Years
by Charles Capper (Oxford)
The story used to be told that the dyspeptic Scotsman Thomas Carlyle, upon learning that the American bluestocking Margaret Fuller had declared, "I accept the Universe," replied, "Gad!! she'd better." But it turns out that their relationship was far more complicated than this lecture-room caricature suggests. Indeed, nearly everything we thought we knew about Fuller is more complicated and interesting than the books said. With the completion of Capper's award-winning biography (the first volume appeared in 1992), our understanding of one of the most original and consequential "men of letters" in 19th-century America—this country's first modern feminist—is as complete as the art of biography allows.

Swimming in a Sea of Death
by David Rieff (Simon & Schuster)
A devoted son writes a wrenching account of his mother's determined but ultimately unsuccessful struggle against a hideous form of cancer. A recipe to move an audience, you'd think, but there's an overarching sense of arrogance on the part of both writer and subject. Susan Sontag "came to being ill," writes Rieff, "imbued with a profound sense of being the exception to every rule." The way she flouted medical protocol, even when there were good reasons for it, becomes a cautionary tale about how not to behave in a terrible situation. Her actions led to suffering far more horrendous than it had to be. Sontag's hubris was such that she seems to have believed that she would even be the exception to the universal human condition of death. Goethe harbored a similar belief, and although her talent wasn't equal to his, her egotism was.

FICTION



Last Night at the Lobster
by Stewart O'Nan (Viking)
The conscientious manager of the soon-to-be-defunct Red Lobster in a tired New England mall seems an unlikely hero, but O'Nan's customary empathy and scrupulous attention to psychological and external detail coax poetry from the prosaic. Using an isolating pre-Christmas blizzard to intensify the sense of the restaurant as a world unto itself, and structuring the novel around the routine tasks of opening, running, and closing the establishment, O'Nan offers a moving look at the man who would lavish care on such a place and its people. This is the melancholy but never bitter story of a decent guy trying to do the right thing, a man whose only reward is a transfer to the Olive Garden.

Porius
by John Cowper Powys
(Overlook Duckworth)
In this novel, first published greatly abridged in 1951 and now painstakingly restored, the eccentric Powys produced a vision of northern Wales in the Dark Ages, specifically one week in October 499 A.D., so packed with characters,

PETER HOEY

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their inner lives, and their side stories that it threatens to burst its covers despite its now-ample (more than 700) pages. Part historical novel, part magic realism, part romance, the book, told mostly from the point of view of the son of a Welsh prince of mixed blood, brings together Romans, Picts, Celts, Saxons, Scots, and shadowy forest folk—along with their customs and cults—in a time of intense flux, when Christianity is beginning to edge out older religions. Tolkienesque in its setting of wooded hills and mysterious mountains and its incorporation of sorcery and martial alliances, *Porius* is far more historically based than Tolkien's fantasies (if still often inaccurate) and far more realistically human, and is therefore far messier.

Mister Pip
by Lloyd Jones (Dial)
This charming short novel, which won the 2007 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, was favored to win the Man Booker Prize, but lost out to Anne Enright's *The Gathering*. A pity, since it's much more original, making some important points about the universality of archetypes and even of eccentricities. Set on a Pacific island devastated by war, it describes a white teacher's efforts to fascinate his native pupils with the temporally and geographically far-off world of Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Not just a delightful read, *Mister Pip* shows the cut and thrust of true multiculturalism.

HISTORY

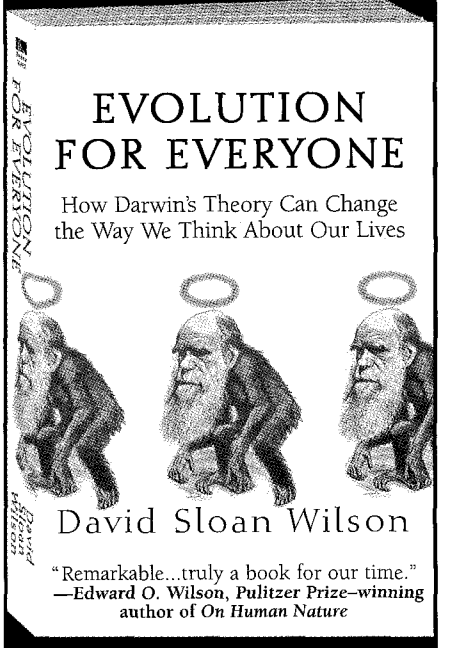
Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa
by Martin Meredith (PublicAffairs)
The story of how the discovery of gemstones and gold blew apart the agrarian Afrikaner paradise of the two all-white oligarchic Boer republics has never been told with more verve, clarity, and sound judgment than here. The book's account of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, a mere 40 pages, is a masterpiece of compression replete with memorable detail. Meredith's analysis of how the black majority of the region, largely ignored by the contending juggernauts of British imperialism and Afrikaner nationalism, figured in this tale is as informed as it is salutary.

The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War
by David Halberstam (Hyperion)
Much of what Halberstam says in this work, completed just before his death last April, is astonishingly off. He argues, for instance, that the furious outcry that followed President Truman's firing of General Douglas MacArthur in 1951 "was a kind of giant antiwar rally, not just anti–Korean War, but probably anti–Cold War as well." Yet only seven pages earlier he quotes the MacArthur letter that led to his firing, in which the general stated his determination "to meet force with maximum counterforce" and added, "If we lose the war to Communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable." If you can say that the anger at the removal of an iconic figure of total warfare is an antiwar emotion, then why should anyone trust anything else you say?

The Warmest Room in the House: How the Kitchen Became the Heart of the Twentieth-Century American Home
by Steven Gdula (Bloomsbury)
Forget heart and hearth, argues the author of this inviting study of domiciliary evolution—home is where the stove is. Tracing the American kitchen's century-long rise from lowly back room to glowing center of domestic life, Gdula scours the historical pantry, illuminating the development of food preparation, scullery technology, gastronomic design, and culinary celebrity. The decade-by-decade survey he serves up is a delight, rich but restrained.

Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours
by Noga Arikha (Ecco)
Thought for centuries to influence an individual's mood, health, and character, the "four humors"—blood, phlegm, black bile, and choler—long ago fell out of medical favor. Or did they? The historian Arikha traces the humoral doctrine through the ages, exploring the intersection of folk wisdom and state-of-the-art science, and provocatively argues that the basic model continues to inform science in surprising ways. Arikha makes a compelling case that in the mind-body relationship, "the present is impregnated with our past."

"Wilson does for evolution what Steven Levitt does for economics in *Freakonomics*. Lively and provocative."
—*Chicago Sun-Times*



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SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT

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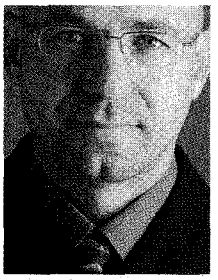
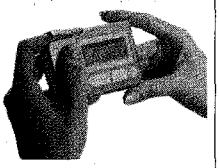
Effects of stress reversed by amazing new medical device.



Now you can enjoy the pleasures of stress-free living and feel younger in just 15 minutes a day. It's surprisingly easy with the remarkable new medical device called the StressEraser.

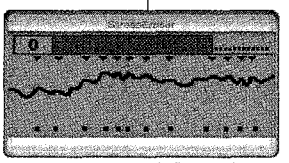
This medical breakthrough actually reverses *ergotropic tuning*; the harmful process that causes your nerves to respond faster and more strongly to stress; making you feel it more easily, more quickly, more intensely.

Medical Discovery Leads to Breakthrough in Reducing Stress.

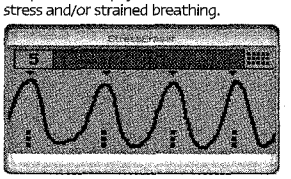


Medical researchers now know that the harmful effects of *ergotropic tuning* are intricately connected to the biological mechanisms of breathing. More importantly, they learned that you can actually regulate the stress-producing activity of this system by regulating this basic bodily function.

To do this, Helicor, Inc. has developed the amazing StressEraser that measures the effects of breathing and guides the user to control this basic biological activity.



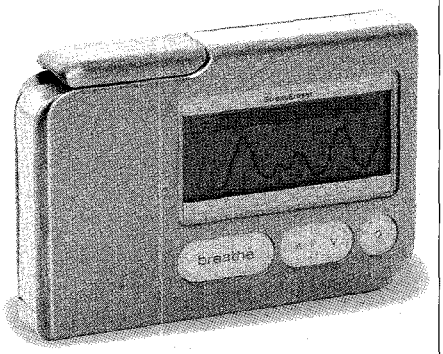
BEFORE: StressEraser indicators show the presence of physical and emotional stress and/or strained breathing.



AFTER 15 MINUTES: Harmful stress levels significantly reduced after using StressEraser cues to synchronize your breathing.

Compact and easy to use – takes just 15 minutes a day.

The StressEraser is designed to fit in the palm of your hand and is simple to operate. All it takes is a relaxing 15 minutes right before bed each night to adjust your breathing; then set it aside.



Your system will continue to reverse the effects of the stress you've built up all day – while you sleep!

Erase stress while you sleep and feel good again in 30 Days.*

Within two weeks you will begin to feel a difference all day long. And within a month, you will feel like you did when you were young, before the stresses caused by *ergotropic tuning*, became part of your life.

The StressEraser Guarantee:

Try the StressEraser before bed FREE for 30 nights and Helicor guarantees you will feel good again or simply return it. No questions asked.

"The StressEraser is a ground-breaking achievement in the area of stress reduction and biofeedback."

Robert Reiner, Ph.D.
Exec. Director, Behavioral Associates
Faculty, Dept. of Psychiatry, NYU Medical Center

"I tried it... a pretty remarkable tool."
MSNBC

"Now you don't have to use a $3000 machine at your doctor's."
Forbes

"You feel so relaxed yet focused."
ABC GOOD MORNING AMERICA

"9 out of 10"
WIRED

"...my forehead, neck and shoulders felt more relaxed"
The Washington Post

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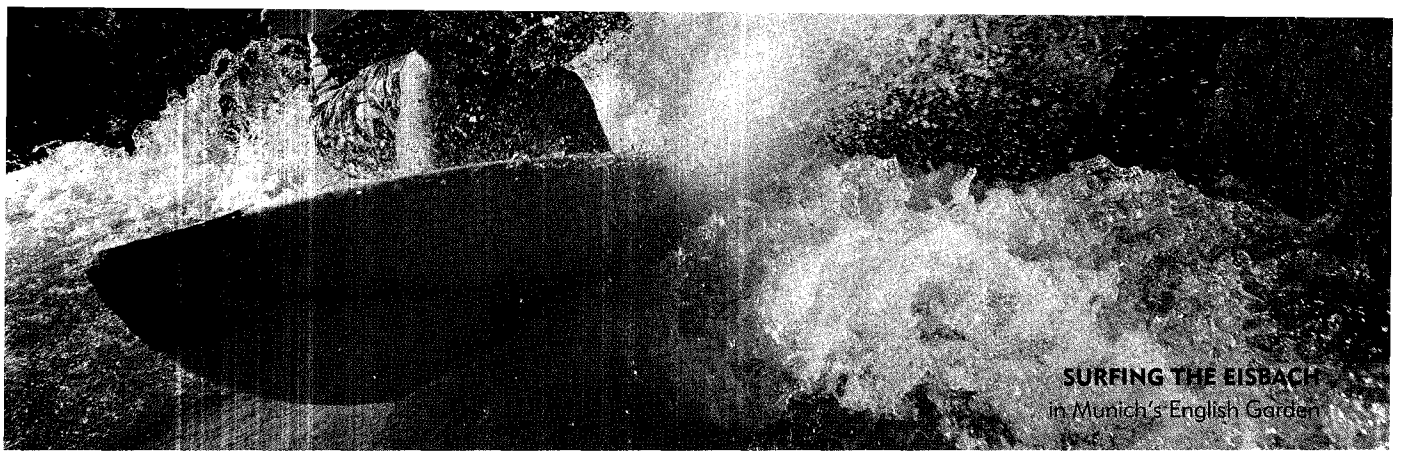

SURFING THE EISBACH
in Munich's English Garden

SANDRA BEHNE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

TRAVELS

Permanent waves, soggy schnitzel, and accordion tunes in Bavaria's landlocked capital

Munich's Malibu

BY MICHAEL SCOTT MOORE

Steffen Dittrich is a short, happy guy with bad teeth and thinning red hair. On the rolling wave, he looks a bit like a madman—coarse, short beard, bulging eyes—but he has grace as well as aggression. He kicks and carves, bashes the churning water, pulls a 360, slides a bit, carves, and cuts back again. He stays up for five minutes, trimming back and forth in place—longer than any surfer that day. Then he falls, and the current carries him downstream in the Eisbach, a canal that flows through Munich's English Garden.

The Eisbach, or "Ice Creek," a tributary of the Isar River, starts where two underground canals in Munich meet and emerge under the 19th-century Prinzregentenstrasse bridge, next to the city's modern-art museum. In the 1970s, civic engineers laid three rows of concrete blocks along the canal bottom to weaken the flow of water surging up from underground. The shape of the bottom—along with wooden boards wedged into the canal by local surfers—creates a fast but surfable standing wave that has become the most popular "river-surfing" spot in Europe.

"German surfing" might sound about as plausible as "Nebraskan seafood," but the sport has been thriving here for years. The first native to surf a German swell is said to have been Uwe Drath, a lifeguard on Sylt, in 1952. Sylt has been a chic island resort since the turn of the century—a kind of North Sea Martha's Vineyard—but in the postwar years it was still relatively undeveloped; the island's first "surf club," founded in the 1960s, held meetings in a converted cattle stall. Good waves break on Sylt only in the autumn, though; during high summer, the sea is generally flat. So the discovery of a year-round wave in Munich has created an enclave of borrowed California culture in the heart of Bavaria. Another canal in the city has a rideable wave as well, and is home to an annual competition that draws surfers from across the country, if not the world.

I grew up in California but live in Berlin, so it was partly homesickness, partly curiosity, that brought me to Munich for

MORE ON THEATLANTIC.COM
For an author-narrated slideshow of surfing in Munich, visit www.theatlantic.com/eisbach.

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THE TRAVEL ADVISORY

The Munich Surf Open, held each year in June or July, is a daylong event at the Flosslände near Thalkirchen, a neighborhood of Munich with its own subway stop (U-Bahn Thalkirchen). Dozens of surfers perform, and hundreds of spectators watch from the banks. The date for a given year's contest is announced at http://grossstadtsurfer.de. Surfers can be seen on the Eisbach and Flosslände waves at other times, too, most consistently from May through September; even German surfers don't like freezing water.

Where to stay

The **Hotel Carlton** (www.carlton-garni.de) is near the bottom of the English Garden, just a few blocks from the Eisbach wave. The rooms are small, and the place has a somewhat dingy European-business-traveler vibe; but the kitchen serves an excellent breakfast, complete with fresh eggs and English-style sausage, and the downtown location is hard to beat.

Also close by is the **Vier Jahreszeiten**, or Four Seasons (www.kempinski-vierjahreszeiten.com), one of the city's old grand hotels. Built in 1858 and rebuilt in 1947, it has hosted royalty from around the world.

If you've come to surf, or just want to travel like a surfer, make reservations at the **Euro Youth Hotel** (www.euro-youth-hotel.de), which has cheap single rooms, even-cheaper dorm beds, free WiFi, and bikes for rent. It's not far from the Eisbach, either, and it's across the street from the Hauptbahnhof, or train station, making the trip from the train to the hostel with your surfboard almost hassle-free (board rentals are practically nonexistent in the city). The hostel is also within easy walking distance of the downtown pedestrian zone.

Where to eat and drink

Downtown Munich has plenty of options, from gourmet restaurants to the famous beer halls, and the selection in the pedestrian zone will be obvious to any wandering tourist. Here are two good choices outside the pedestrian zone but still centrally located, near the Hauptbahnhof. For an authentic atmosphere and no-nonsense southern German food—pork schnitzel, perch filets, and the like—look for the **Gaststätte Bavaria** (www.gaststaette-bavaria.de) at Bayerstrasse 81. This is the sort of smoky, open-room restaurant where train conductors come to relax after a shift. For something fancier, try **Lutter & Wegner** at Lenbachplatz 8 (www.l-w-muenchen.de), where entrees range from sauerbraten with potato puree and red cabbage to duck breast with truffled Savoy cabbage and glazed chestnuts.

Things to do

Kayaking on the Isar, unlike surfing, is fully legal. Not many places rent out boats, but some local groups, including the **Munich Kayak Riders' Club** (www.cmk-muenchen.de) offer lessons.

For an unabashedly tourist experience on the canals, you can catch a daylong log-raft tour, complete with music, food, and kegs of beer. These are operated by numerous "Isarflossfahrt" companies (www.isarflossfahrten.de or www.flossfahrt.eu) and run between May and September. Most tours leave from the town of Wolfratshausen, about 20 miles south of Munich.

Nearby land-based activities include a visit to the **Haus der Kunst** (Prinzregentenstrasse 1; www.hausderkunst.de), Munich's modern-art museum, just a stone's throw from the Eisbach wave. The museum is in a stone building erected during Hitler's rule, when it was called Haus der Deutschen Kunst, or House of German Art. Now it's a world-class institution that has exhibited works by artists such as Paul Klee, Joseph Beuys, and the living avant-gardists Anish Kapoor and Gilbert & George.

The **Tierpark Hellabrunn** (Tierparkstrasse 30; www.tierpark-hellabrunn.de), a short walk from the Flosslände wave, is one of the largest zoos in the world; it's also the first "Geo-Zoo," built in 1911 with the idea of keeping animals in large enclosed habitats instead of cages.

the Surf Open last July. Before the contest, I had a look at the Eisbach wave, which is faster, more dangerous, and more famous than its rival across town. I rented a comfortable but uncool Dutch-style bike and pedaled with my board to the English Garden. The river boiled up from under two stone bridge arches, and spectators lined the bridge and the banks of the canal. Willows and chestnuts hung over the water. From the bank, I could hear the thrilling rush of white water and catch whiffs of neoprene wet suits and surf wax—smells that would have reminded me of home if they hadn't been mixed, incongruously, with cool riverine air instead of salt.

The Eisbach is about 50 feet wide, too narrow for more than one person at a time to ride the rough, waist-high wave. Surfers wait their turn in lines along each bank. In the water, they face the bridge and surf in place on the curl of the wave. It isn't easy. When my turn came, I positioned my board on the churning crest with my feet and pushed off. But I wasn't used to the perpetual-motion wave. Instead of building speed and running forward along a swell of moving water, as in the ocean—where I would have all the wave's energy at my back—I had to balance and steer into a powerful oncoming current. The idea was not to move forward but to resist going backward, ideally while performing lots of fancy tricks. I was like a bird in a wind tunnel. I fell several times, nearly cracking my head on the underwater concrete and floating down to a meadow where sunbathing women giggled each time I climbed out with my board.

The first surfers in Munich started cautiously, using ropes tied to bridges or trees to help them keep their balance. This was in the 1970s, and river surfing was illegal and could bring heavy fines. Dittrich spent the summer of 1983 in the English Garden as a student surf bum, living in his VW bus. Whenever the cops came, he says, "I just let go of my rope and floated away. The canal down there splits three ways, so it was hard for them to find you."

Surfing in the canals is still technically against the law. Many surfers have

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suffered dislocated shoulders or broken bones from hitting the concrete blocks. Still, the number of outlaw surfers in Munich swelled throughout the 1980s and 1990s—there are now 300 or 400—and the police eventually gave up. They even tolerate the annual competition, which began in 2001.

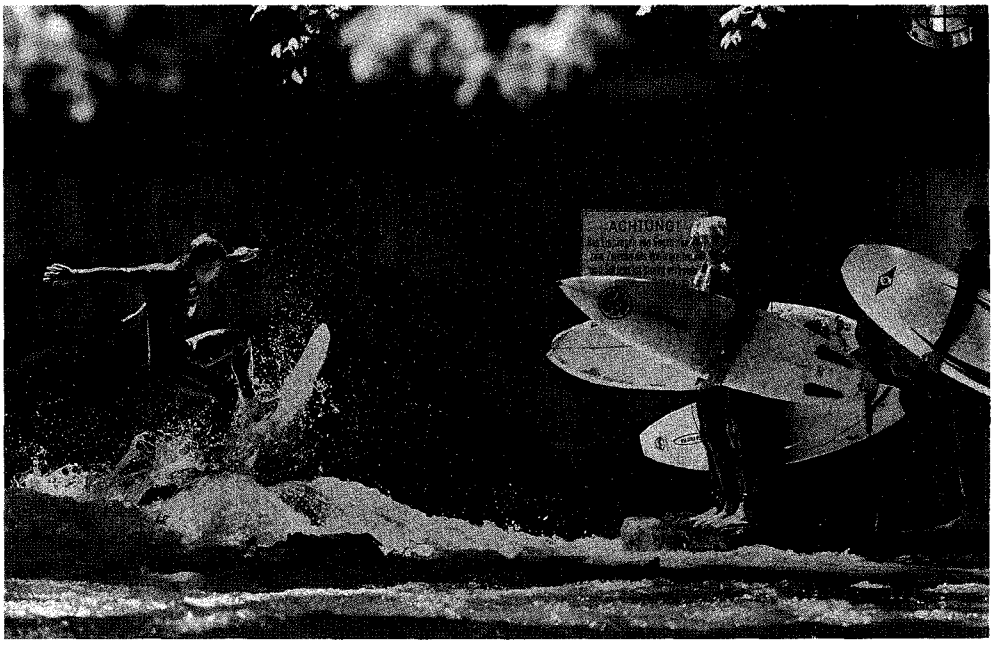
The Munich Surf Open is held at the Flosslände—a pair of canals beside the Isar, some five miles south of the Eisbach wave. I pedaled there on my bike too, following the wide basin of the river, which bends through the city between high, fortresslike stone banks. Munich sprang up around the Isar during the Middle Ages, when the local fords and bridges made the area an important center of commerce. The current bridges are immodest structures encrusted with statues and named after Bavarian electors and princes: Luitpoldbrücke, Maximiliansbrücke, Ludwigsbrücke. People stared as I rode past the bridges on my clunky bike, with my surfboard under one arm.

The Flosslände wave forms under an arching modern bridge at the bottleneck of a broad canal. The water flows languidly between lush trees until it reaches a narrow, sloping race of concrete under the bridge, and then it rears up—because of a sudden change in the shape of the concrete, and more jammed-in wooden boards—into a roughly two-foot-high curl. City authorities use sluices here to regulate the volume of water to a power station downstream, and the size and speed of the wave change with the strength of the flow.

On the day of the contest last summer, the wave was large—about three feet high—and fairly fast. I got there in the morning, before the competition, when non-contestants could take turns in the water. The wave wasn't as rough as the Eisbach's, and it was easier to surf; I kept my balance for a couple of minutes. But it was strange: the smooth, glassy, insistent green current flowed under my board like a treadmill.

Flosslände means "raft landing," and the Bavarians used to float cargo down the canals on log rafts. These days replicas of the rafts—operated by tourist companies and carrying bratwurst grills, beer kegs, and oompah bands—drift down the canals. Every so often one plunged through the wave like a lumbering version of the log ride at Disneyland. The surfers made way, reluctantly.

The contest started under a high, hot sun. People sunbathed on towels or barbecued in a nearby meadow. Several hundred spectators—shirtless men in sunglasses, women in bikinis—looked on as the competitors, some 50 in all, took turns trying to impress a panel of judges. Points were awarded for tricks—360s, off-the-lips, little hopping aerials—as well as style. A Humvee next to the judges' tent blasted music (reggae, the Red Hot Chili Peppers), and a TV broadcaster from Eurosport kept up a running commentary. Banners for the sporting companies Quiksilver and Völkl festooned the banks.



AP PHOTO/DIETHER ENDLICHER

Europe has always had a love-hate relationship with America, and the paradox of the surf scene here is that it's a grassroots movement of the *Volk*, against German officialdom, to make room for something decidedly un-German—a Polynesian sport in an American pop-culture mode. This doesn't mean the surfers want to be American. One German surfer told me the Flosslände crowds were fine during the contest, but obnoxious during Oktoberfest, when their numbers swell with foreigners. "All these Americans and Australians stay in the campground over there," she said, pointing beyond the bridge. "Then they see the wave and want to try it out."

Still, for a few hours the scene looked to me like a bunch of Germans trying to pretend they were in Hawaii or California; except for the landlocked heat and the freshwater smells, the Munich Surf Open seemed no different from a small-surf competition in Malibu or Huntington Beach. But then a massive raft loaded with drunken Germans and a band playing "Volare" on French horns and accordions came splashing through the wave. Minutes later I found a young surfer on the bank with a soaked beer pretzel in one hand and a sodden hunk of schnitzel in the other.

"The good thing is that you can always get something to eat from the rafts," he said.

I blinked. "Did you really swim out there and cop that schnitzel?"

"Of course," he said, shrugging. And it was hard to deny that the Bavarians were onto something new. A

Michael Scott Moore lives in Berlin, where he's at work on a book about surfing.

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FOOD

A new university in Italy aims to elevate gastronomy to an academic discipline—and put its students through a humbling workout.

Slow Food, High Gear

BY CORBY KUMMER

"*Vuoi pedalare?*" Do you want to pedal? That was the insinuating, irresistible question put to travelers on the month-long Viaggio sul Po, a bike trip 150 students at Slow Food's University of Gastronomic Sciences took across northern Italy last fall following the valley of the once-mighty Po. Many of the students had spent the previous year preparing for the trip, which was designed to explore what remains of the riverine culture. They filmed interviews with farmers and fishermen who remembered when the river provided much of the populace with its livelihood. They mapped the region and its specialties. They even commented on prototypes of their bike, a 1950s no-gear design made by the cult bike maker Abici and painted in cool colors.

The trip was also designed to unite an institution still in its growing phase. Like most initiatives dreamed up by Carlo Petrini, Slow Food's founder, the university began as an audacious idea. As Slow Food matured and went global, Petrini realized that he would need to train future leaders—of the movement itself, of the food and tourism industries, and of the government ministries capable of putting into practice many of the changes Slow Food advocates. For a campus, he chose a gorgeous Romanesque-revival castle built in the 1830s by the Savoy royal family as a summer lodge and agricultural research center in Pollenzo, three miles from Bra, the cozy but active small city 45 minutes from Turin where Petrini was born and where Slow Food is headquartered.

MORE ON THEATLANTIC.COM
For a slideshow of the Viaggio sul Po bicycle trip, visit www.theatlantic.com/slow.

HENRY HOFFMAN

In his stump speech Petrini often derides "idiots with spoons" on television who offer an endless succession of "recipes, recipes, recipes." Gastronomy is interdisciplinary, he insists, involving economics, environmental science, history, biology, and anthropology—and social justice, the ideal that got him started in politics in the 1970s and that remains (along with pure pleasure in food and eating) the bedrock of the movement he founded in 1989. The university would be consistent with Slow Food's guiding principles of "Good, clean, and fair."

Petrini was not the first to want to put gastronomy on a par with other

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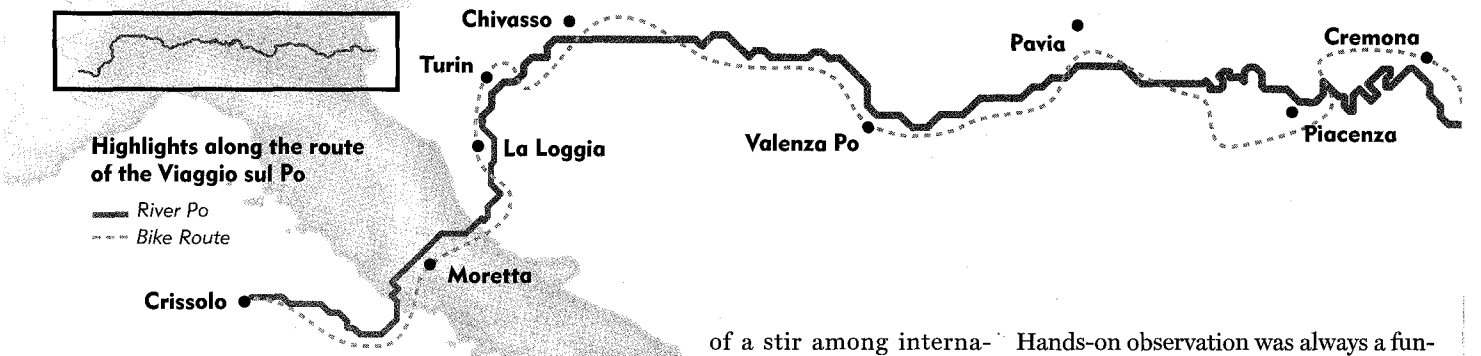

liberal arts. In the United States, Julia Child sought to establish a school of gastronomy in California. That effort failed, but she eventually had the satisfaction of seeing Metropolitan College, a part of Boston University, become the first U.S. school to grant a master's degree in gastronomy (the first person to teach in the new program was Jacques Pepin, who returns often). Several universities have followed suit, but so far no American liberal-arts college offers an undergraduate degree in gastronomy. No European university did, either, until Petrini's audacious idea began to take shape.

Pollenzo's place on the food map was assured when Piedmont's (and perhaps Italy's) most prestigious restaurant—Guido, legendary for its *agnolotti*—decided to relocate in a corner tower of the restored castle complex, which includes a small hotel and conference center. Guido's opening caused as much of a stir among international food lovers as that of the university, which welcomed its first class of 60 students in October of 2004.

In theory the school is bilingual, with courses offered in English and Italian. But a working knowledge of Italian is helpful to follow most classes and simply to get by in town. Though the current student body comes from 28 countries, it includes few Americans, who have so far been ineligible for student loans (the university offers scholarships against the tuition of 19,000 euros and is now applying for U.S. accreditation). Americans do, however, enroll in significant numbers in the master's program introduced two years ago at another former royal retreat near Parma, in the heart of prosciutto and Parmigiano-Reggiano country. It offers year-long courses tailored to English-speaking students (I teach writing seminars there).

The feature that distinguishes Slow Food's university is travel, and lots of it. Hands-on observation was always a fundamental part of Petrini's plan. Tuition includes five trips a year, each five to 14 days long. Three work-study trips, or "stages," in Italy introduce students to artisanal and industrial producers who cure ham and sausage, roast coffee, make pasta, press olive oil, brew craft beer, and the like; two longer trips examine an entire region's products in greater depth. For undergraduates these "territorial stages" progress from Italy to other European countries to other continents.

ALBERTO CAPATTI, the dean of the University of Gastronomic Sciences, leading his troops; shellfish at a restaurant in the Po delta

HENRY HOFFMAN

Part rolling publicity stunt, part serious study, the Viaggio sul Po was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for both the students (who were required to go) and the several faculty members who decided to pedal along for all or part of the 24-day tour. Sometimes teachers held classes in the afternoon, after the day's biking and visits, but the academic content was light. The logistics of constant packing and unpacking, not to mention the biking itself, ruled out a heavy course load.

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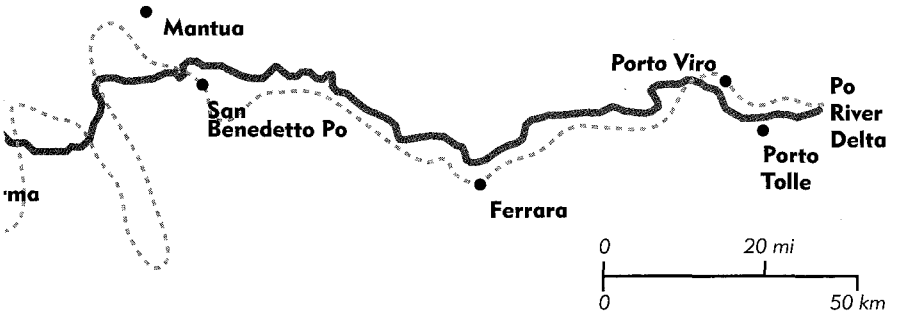


In a few days of pedaling in 20-to-40-kilometer spurts, I learned more than I usually would in a week of driving around doing research on my own. I joined a group visit to a cooperative that processes and braids garlic, and watched a farmer supervise the planting of acres of crushed garlic bulbs on her family's farm. She led me into a garage-like shed where the new crop is slowly heated to dry for storage and then spun in drums to sort the heads by size. The scent of warm garlic was overpowering. It seemed to permeate my viscera, as if I had entered the world's largest Chinese restaurant.

On another day, we saw fields of the region's famous Chioggia radicchio, the red chicory named for a town south of Venice near the delta where the Po meets the Adriatic. Long a malarial swamp, the delta was drained in the 19th century; during the 1960s, methane drilling lowered the water table, allowing Adriatic saltwater to submerge entire farms and villages that had lived on rice cultivation. But the sandy soil—crossing the fields was like walking on a beach—is still good for certain vegetables, including radicchio. The heads look like any sprawling lettuce: only the core is red. We watched, surprised, as women standing on a mechanical harvester tossed the green leaves—fully half of each head—behind the rolling machine.

Although most of the fish that sustained the communities along the Po vanished with the postwar rise of heavy industry, some processing centers remain, and aquaculture farms raise fish that could once be found in the wild—including sturgeon, the ancient, scale-less relative of the shark, formerly fished for its compact, Dover sole–like meat but now raised only for its eggs. At one farm the owner easily netted a sturgeon, which he described as an amiably dumb creature, from a shallow concrete pool. Just two feet long, unlike the leviathans of the Caspian Sea (almost extinct because of overfishing), it looked like a friendly iguana. I wanted to take it home as a pet.

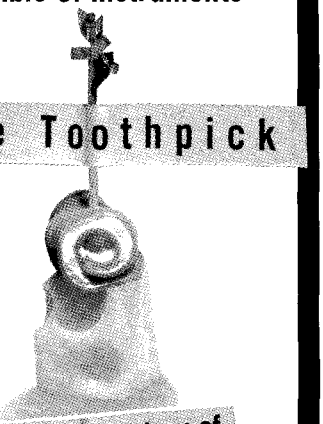
Much of the education was cultural, and fun. At many stops students were greeted with concerts, including one performed on 17th-century violins in Cremona, home of the world's most coveted string instruments. Two weeks into the trip, Gérard Depardieu turned up to join students at the restaurant where, more than 30 years before, the crew filming *Novecento* had dined every night. He reminisced about getting drunk with Robert De Niro the night he learned he had been nominated for his first Oscar.

At lunch the day before the trip's end, students stretched out in the late-fall sun. Petrini, who pedaled occasionally with the group (and always at its head), clapped a hand on the shoulder of Luigi Lepore, a master's graduate who had spent 10 very busy months helping to coordinate the expedition. "Next time, the Nile," he said. "Two and a half years. On camelback. You're in charge of logistics." Lepore went pale.

Petrini's hopes for the university and the movement came together unexpectedly at the Slow Food International Congress in November, just two weeks after the Viaggio ended. In the late 1990s he declared that the future of the movement is the developing world, whose rich repository of biodiversity and farming wisdom is under constant pressure from urbanization, agro-industry, and pollution. At the conclusion of the last conference four years ago, in Naples, he shouted, "Next time in Puebla!"

He meant the stunning UNESCO World Heritage site that gives its name

From HENRY PETROSKI, author of *The Pencil*, a book about the most humble of instruments



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to a region with what many believe to be Mexico's richest cuisine. His idea was to get out of Europe. At the time, he confessed in his welcoming speech to the more than 500 delegates from 49 countries who did find their way to Puebla in November, he was expressing a somewhat wild and improbable hope. On such "beautiful lies," he said, are dreams built.

The next morning a group of 12 University of Gastronomic Science students, fresh from the Viaggio, took the stage. In carefully composed, shiningly idealistic remarks, they announced their intention to build an international network linking young people working in food and farming. Already they had carved up the globe, each taking responsibility for devising ways for groups to exchange knowledge and collaborate on regional projects. They wanted to set up a Web site in time for the October 2008 meeting of Terra Madre, a biennial Slow Food gathering of nearly 5,000 farmers, artisans, and cooks from all over the world. (Notes on the network's progress will be posted at www.slowfood.com.)

Then six young American activists, fresh from a national summit convened by the Yale Sustainable Food Project, took the stage to describe their own efforts: helping high-school students learn about farming and food production; pressing their universities to buy more food locally; even starting campus chapters of Slow Food. They had come to Puebla, they said, to join forces with the movement and enlist its support.

As the two groups filed offstage, the delegates rose to applaud them, many brushing away tears. In an improvised end to his scheduled speech, Roberto Burdese, the president of Slow Food Italy, announced that the two presentations would change Slow Food history. His prediction came true the very next day, when for the first time Petrini named a university student—John Kariuki Mwangi, from Kenya—to be one of the three international vice presidents.

In a bus on the way to the concluding festivities at Cholula, the site of one of the world's largest pyramids, the two groups cooked up a scheme. They kept it to themselves while the delegates watched Indians in headdresses with six-foot quetzal plumes dance at the pyramid's base. After dinner, Petrini, accompanied by a mariachi band, did a mean Mexican folk dance and led the room in a lusty rendition of "Cielito Lindo."

Deep into the singing and dancing, the students sprang their scheme on the movement's high command. They would stage a two-day happening in Pollenzo right before the next Terra Madre conference. Students, young food producers, and activists would learn about the movement. They would take over the town. Who could say what might happen?

Petrini and his cohorts, steeped in '70s radicalism, couldn't have been happier. This was one beautiful lie, they said, they would make come true.

Corby Kummer is an *Atlantic* senior editor.

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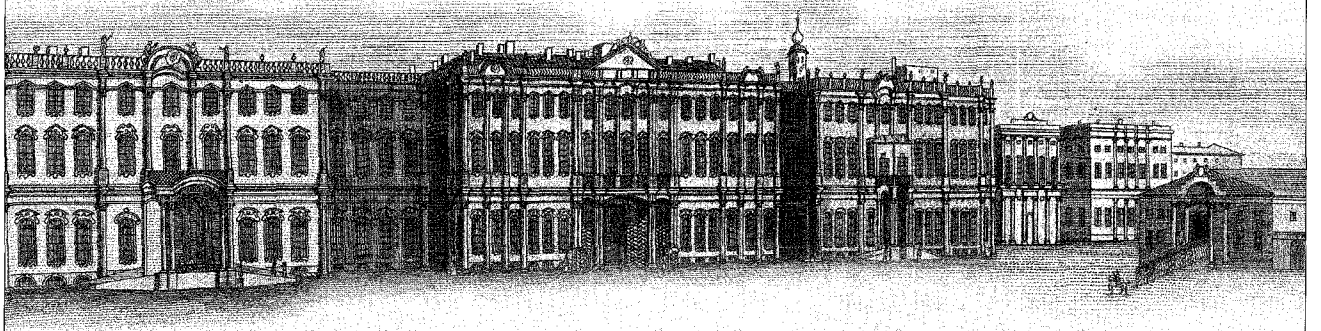

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CULTURE AND COMMERCE

A revolution in typeface design has led to everything from more-legible newspapers and cell-phone displays to extra-tacky wedding invitations.

Playing to Type

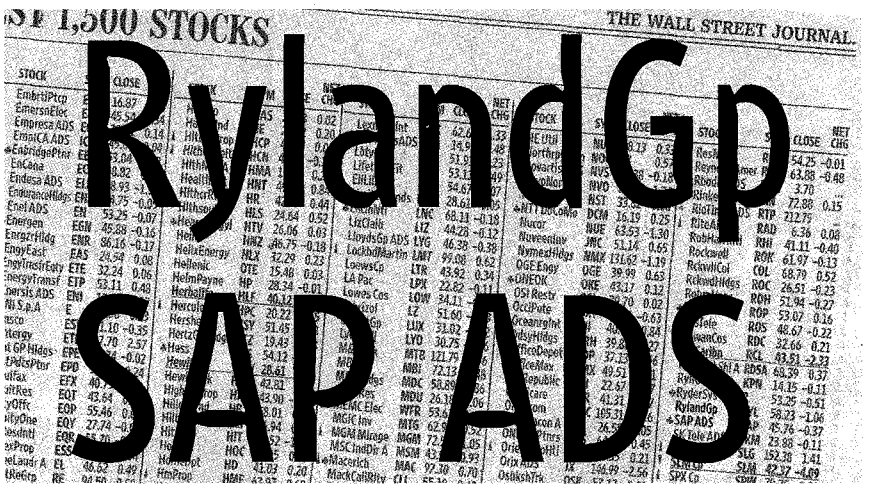
BY VIRGINIA POSTREL

Given its subject, Michael Bierut's *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design*, published last May by Princeton Architectural Press, is remarkably plain. It has no pictures. It isn't oversized. It doesn't even have a dust jacket.

Yet the book is a graphic extravaganza. Each of the 79 essays is set in a different typeface, ranging in age from Bembo, designed in 1495, to Flama, created in 2006. This profusion of typefaces would have been inconceivable when Bierut, 50, was starting out as a graphic designer. "I'm not sure in 1982 I could have come up with 79 different text fonts," he says.

Nowadays, even nonprofessionals take an abundance of typefaces for granted. My computer includes about 100 English-language fonts, many of them families encompassing multiple weights—Baskerville in bold, bold italic, italic, regular, semibold, and semibold italic, for instance—and all available instantly. Basic cultural literacy now demands at least a passing familiarity with typefaces: witness a November episode of *Jeopardy* that featured the category "Knowledge of Fonts," with correct responses including "What is Helvetica?" and "What is Bodoni?" A thoroughly entertaining (really) documentary called *Helvetica*, tracing the rise and fall and rise of the 20th century's most ubiquitous typeface, played to sold-out crowds on the film-festival circuit last year.

The profusion of fonts is one more product of the digital revolution. Beginning in the mid-'80s and accelerating in the 1990s, type design weathered the sort of radical, technology-driven transformation that other creative industries, including music, publishing, and movies, now face. Old business models and



DISTORTED WHEN MAGNIFIED, *The Wall Street Journal*'s Retina typeface was designed to keep ink from blurring the tiny agate type of stock tables.

intermediaries disappeared seemingly overnight. Software replaced industrial processes. Tangible products—metal, film, computer disks—dissolved into bits and bytes sold over the Internet. Prices plummeted. Consumers started buying directly. From their kitchen tables, independent designers could undertake experiments that had once required bet-the-company investments. "Having an idea for a typeface used to be like having an idea for a new-model car," says Bierut. Now the distance between idea and execution, designer and user, has contracted.

Though still a tiny number—maybe a couple hundred worldwide—more people than ever are making a living designing type. Many others, mostly graphic designers, have turned type design into a profitable sideline. And more people than ever are buying fonts. Tens of thousands of fonts already exist, and more are created every day. The question is why.

For designers, the rigidity of an alphabet presents a never-ending artistic challenge: How do you do something new and still preserve the letters' essential forms? "It's a similar sort of urge that a painter or a sculptor or a musician would have who wants to bring something new into the world," says Matthew Carter, the dean of U.S.-based typeface designers and, thanks to a teenage internship at a Dutch printing company in 1955, one of today's few working designers who learned to cut metal type by hand. Carter's creations include Verdana and Georgia, which he designed for Microsoft, and Bell Centennial, the font used in phone books.

Unlike painting, sculpture, or music, typefaces must be *useful* to someone. Fortunately for designers, the digital age has produced new problems to solve—developing typefaces that work on mobile phones, for one—and enabled

MORE ON THEATLANTIC.COM
For a video featuring designer Michael Bierut and an interview with *Helvetica* director Gary Hustwit, visit www.theatlantic.com/fonts.

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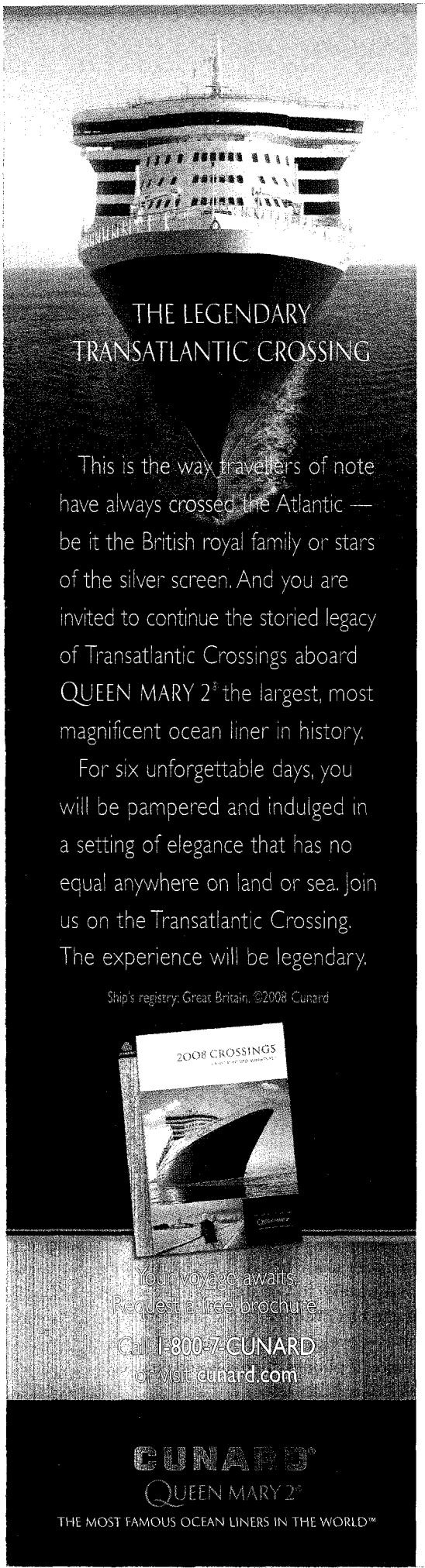

better solutions to old problems. In 2001, *The Wall Street Journal* hired Jonathan Hoefler and Tobias Frere-Jones to create a new typeface for its financial tables. The result, called Retina, uses the microscopic precision of digital design to correct for the blurring that takes place when thin ink hits cheap paper at high speed. Designed for tiny agate type, Retina looks bizarre at larger sizes; Frere-Jones compares it to a fish evolved to survive at extreme ocean depths. The strokes of the lowercase *t* pinch in at their intersection, making them look more like four blunt arrows than two bars. The triangle in the uppercase *A* bulges slightly inward. The dot on the lowercase *i* is square and wider than the downstroke, and each curves away from the other. Such distortions compensate for ink blobs, making the font more readable than its predecessors. More recently, the designers created a toned-down version of Retina for *Journal* headlines.

When *The Journal* shrank its pages in 2007, it adopted another font, called Exchange, developed by Hoefler and Frere-Jones for article text. Exchange lets the paper get more on the page while improving legibility. The font works, Frere-Jones explains, by "taking the unique feature of [each] letter—its essence, the thing that makes it this letter and not something else—and turning it up as loud as it can go." The exaggerations are obvious at larger sizes, but invisible to readers of *Journal* articles.

Not all customers looking for new fonts are so technically demanding or, for that matter, so large or famous. Graphic designers, from solo practitioners to large firms, still account for most licenses. Often, they're simply looking for something new, a signature typeface for a publication or corporate client. *Helvetica* documents the eternal graphic-design debate between partisans of unobtrusive fonts like Helvetica—the reigning metaphor is a "crystal goblet" that contains the words without calling attention to itself—and those who prefer more distinctive, expressive alternatives.

Professionals believe the right font adds valuable nuance to graphic design. Michael Bierut's essay on the AT&T and Bell Telephone logos appears in Bell Gothic, the typeface that Carter's Bell Centennial replaced in phone books. "That's like a little bit of visual aromatherapy to set the mood," says Bierut. And in these days of PDF files and computer printouts, fonts are one of the few graphic elements that designers still control. "Often you can't pick the paper or the ink," says Bierut. "The one universal thing is the typeface."

At the basic consumer level, the profusion of fonts appeals to a culture that celebrates expressive individualism. Who wants old-fashioned wedding invitations—"Mr. and Mrs. John Smith request the honor of your presence" embossed in black on ivory paper—when you can have paper and ink that match your color scheme, and language you've written yourself in a font that looks romantic? (Of course, your wedding invitations could look embarrassingly dated at your 25th anniversary, or hideously tacky right away.) Mere exposure to the proliferation of fonts creates demand. Once you know you can get a special typeface for $20 or so, you're more likely to want to look for just the right one. Fonts, in this sense, are just like shoes or bathroom faucets. They proliferate because different people have different tastes and identities, and because both creators and users value novelty for its own sake.

With enough patience and up-to-date software, type designers can give their creations just about any look, including the idiosyncrasies of lead type or the individuality of hand lettering. As a Hollywood prop designer, Andrew Leman has often created type that looks old-fashioned, mimicking 19th-century newspapers and 1930s telegrams. He has turned some of these partial character sets into fully developed fonts, and four years ago he scored a surprise hit: a font called Satisfaction modeled on hand lettering from 1930s cigarette ads. (The smokes promised "satisfaction.") Its looping curves have shown up in ads for Las Vegas shows, on doughnut boxes in Denver, on a point-of-purchase display for Post-It notes at Staples, and in

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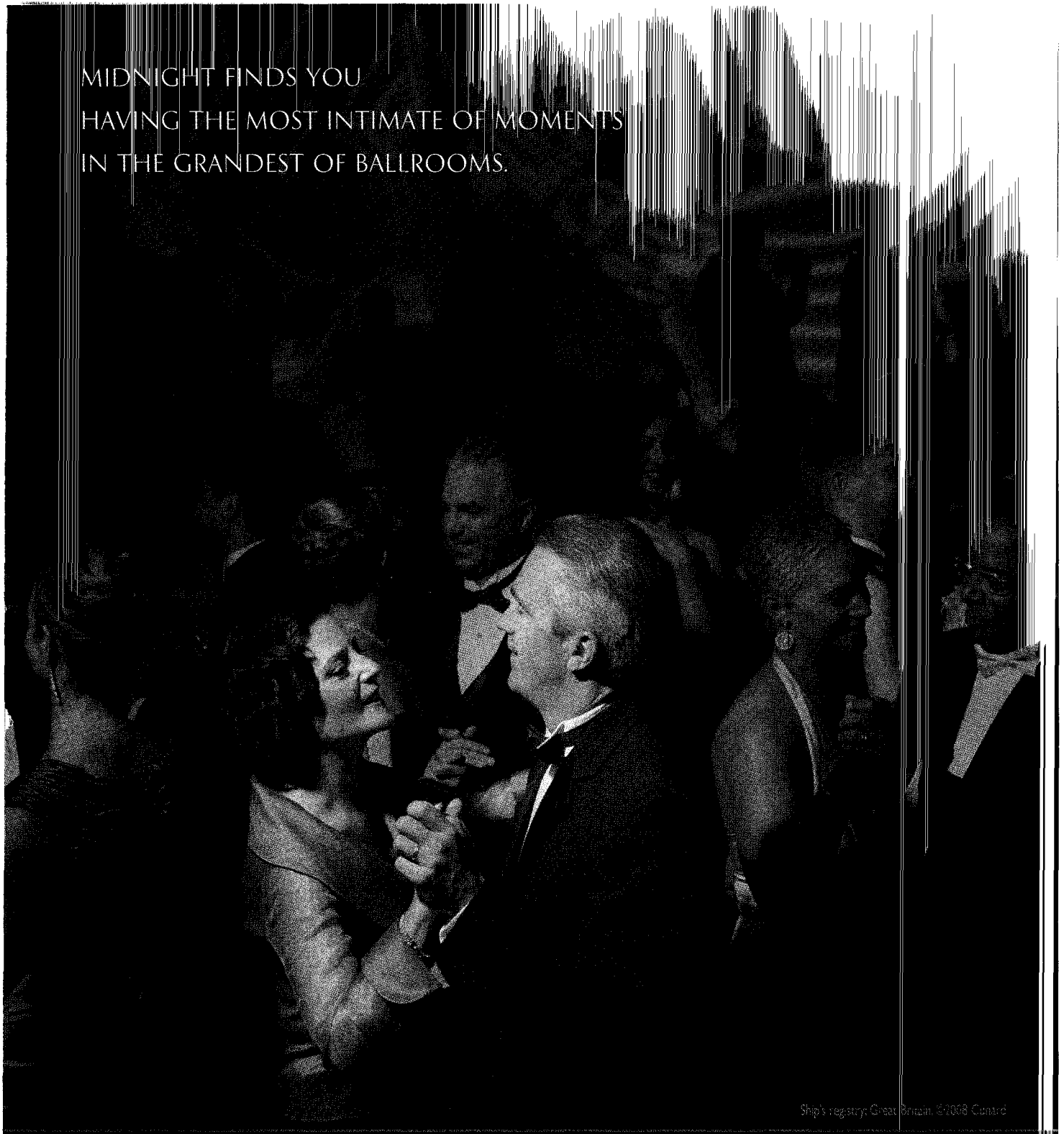

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Satisfaction's success came, in large measure, from a new business model created by MyFonts.com. Unlike traditional foundries, MyFonts doesn't act like a publisher, picking the fonts it thinks will do well and paying a royalty to designers. Instead, it takes every font that meets basic technical and legal criteria. Designers set their own license terms and their own prices, and MyFonts gets a 35 percent cut of sales. To promote new fonts, the site features a What's New list of fonts added or updated in the past 21 days. The ones that sell best go on a second list, called Starlets, limited to fonts no more than 50 days old.

Graphic designers are always on the lookout for something new, if only to spark their thinking, so novelty sells. "Believe it or not, there are lots of people who just come and buy lots of Starlets," says John Collins, head of MyFonts and vice president and chief technology officer at its parent company, Bitstream. The automated system keeps overhead low and gives new fonts a shot at the big time. Collins boasts that half the site's 50 best sellers aren't classics like Helvetica but "relatively new fonts that have just come on the scene and have struck a chord in buyers." Satisfaction made the Starlets list in November 2003 and has been a best seller ever since. In its first four years, Satisfaction sold 7,000 copies at $12 a pop, including about 150 licenses last October. "These are not platinum-record numbers," says Collins. "This is a niche business."

That's how it's always been. But by lowering design, production, and distribution costs, the digital age has made many, many more niches economically viable, to the delight of type lovers. Leman now has an easy way to share his love of "slightly crumbly" type with the "gently used feel of old metal," including vintage-style fonts that sell many fewer copies than Satisfaction. As for Satisfaction, says the part-time type designer, "that font pays my rent."

Virginia Postrel is an *Atlantic* contributing editor. She is writing a book on glamour and looking for the perfect glamorous, yet readable typeface.

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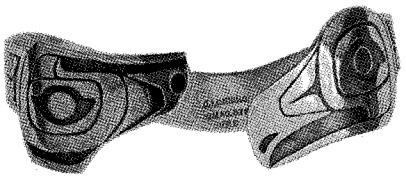

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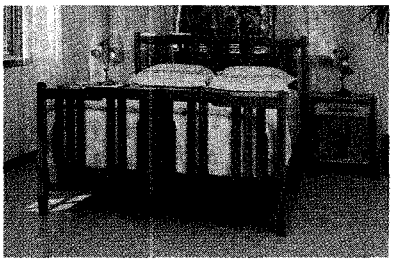

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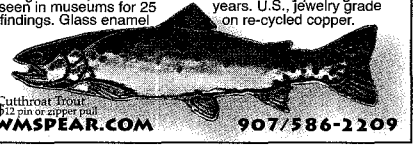

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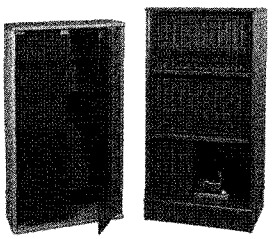

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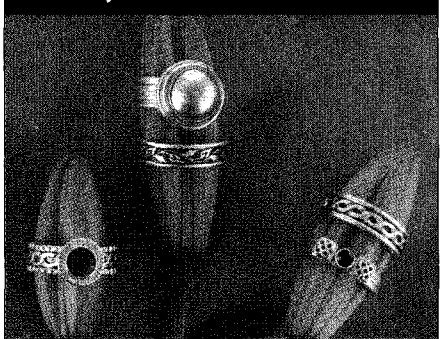

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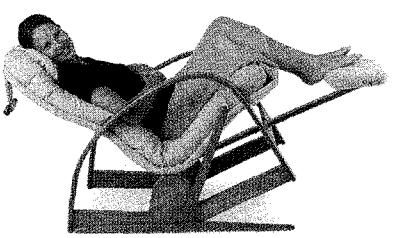

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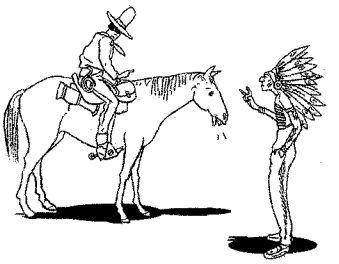


WORD COURT

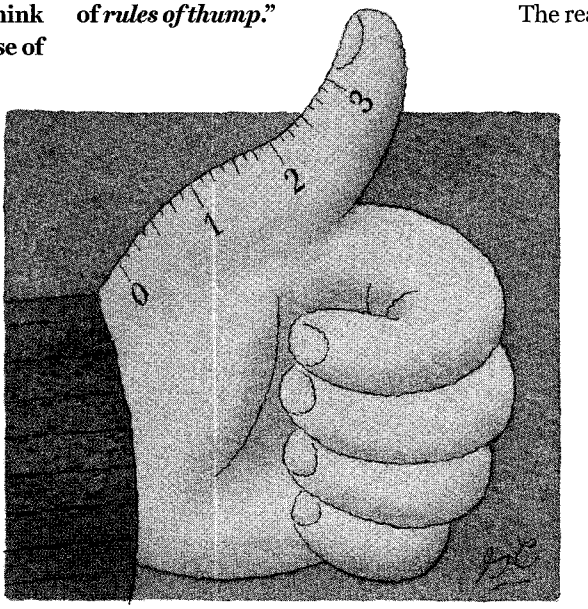
BY BARBARA WALLRAFF

ROBERT J. MARSHALL, of Villa Park, Calif., writes: "A recent newspaper article about Katie Couric's ratings described the network's hopes, in the fall of 2006, that its 'high-wattage anchor would ... draw *scores* of new viewers.' So *scores* now means 'a whole lot'? I have heard this usage before. I think the battle is worth fighting, because of the Gettysburg Address."

I'm with you: *Fourscore and seven years ago* means "87 years ago," not just "way back when." Anyone who knows that would have chosen another word, like *hordes* or *throngs*. Unfortunately, dictionaries are not our allies on this point. All the major contemporary American ones, besides giving "twenty" as a definition of *score*, say that *scores* can mean "very many," "an indefinitely large number," or the like.

Well, this is exactly the kind of thing dictionaries aren't good at. Yes, relative to a smallish number, *scores* means a large number, somewhat larger than *dozens*—as in, "*Scores* of people at the town meeting ..." But relative to a huge number, such as a count of television viewers nationwide, *scores* means a paltry few. Dictionaries don't have the space to get into stuff like this: they define *dozens* pretty much the way they define *scores*. Let's hope that only scores, and not lots, of other dictionary entries are similarly unhelpful about ill-advised usages.

EDWARD SALO, of Mandeville, La., writes: "At work I have noticed my European colleagues making slips with phrases, such as *rules of thump* for *rules of thumb* and *fuzz factor* for *fudge factor*. These phrases get through e-mail and PowerPoint spell-checkers and sound nearly correct. An Internet search for *rules of thump* returns numerous entries—is it actually a slip? I hesitate to correct my coworkers, as I am growing rather fond of *rules of thump*."



If you search for *rules* (or *rule*) *of thump* in writing vetted by professional editors—for instance, in Google News—you'll stop doubting it's a mistake. The phrase is rare in edited media. But please don't ask me how to explain to your colleagues why the correct expression is *rule of thumb*.

One popular theory is that it comes from an archaic English law that allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick, provided it was no bigger around than his thumb. If the evidence bore that out, I suppose *thump* would be nearly as apt as *thumb*. But this theory has been thoroughly debunked. The expression is more likely to have begun as a reference to measuring with one's thumb—maybe temperature but more likely size, in which case *rule* might have originally meant "measuring device" rather than "regulation."

That is to say, for all that's known about the origin of *rule of thumb*, the expression might as well be *rule of thump*. The reason it's not is that it's not.

CLIVE MUIR, of Clemmons, N.C., writes: "As a writing teacher, I can tolerate a little verbal mangling, but *preregister* and *preregister early* drive me nuts! Please clarify."

People do a lot of strange things with *pre-*, but this isn't necessarily one of them. At the start of a new school year or semester, your students are required to *register*, no?

If returning students, for instance, are allowed to register in advance of the general registration period, why shouldn't that be called *preregistration*? And if they're allowed to do it well in advance, can't they *preregister early*? As an analogy, consider *prepayment*, which isn't something one does before paying; it's payment in advance.

I think you should let that one go. Maybe you'd be willing to fill the mental space it took up with a peeve of mine: *advance reservations*. There is no such thing as a reservation that isn't made in advance, so the common phrase *advance reservations* is silly and redundant.

Do you have a language question or dispute? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic, *P.O. Box 67375, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, or send e-mail to msgrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.*

GREG CLARKE

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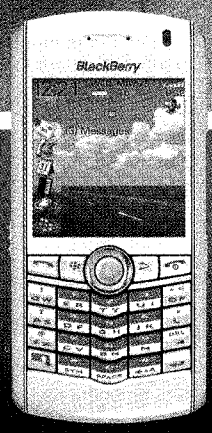

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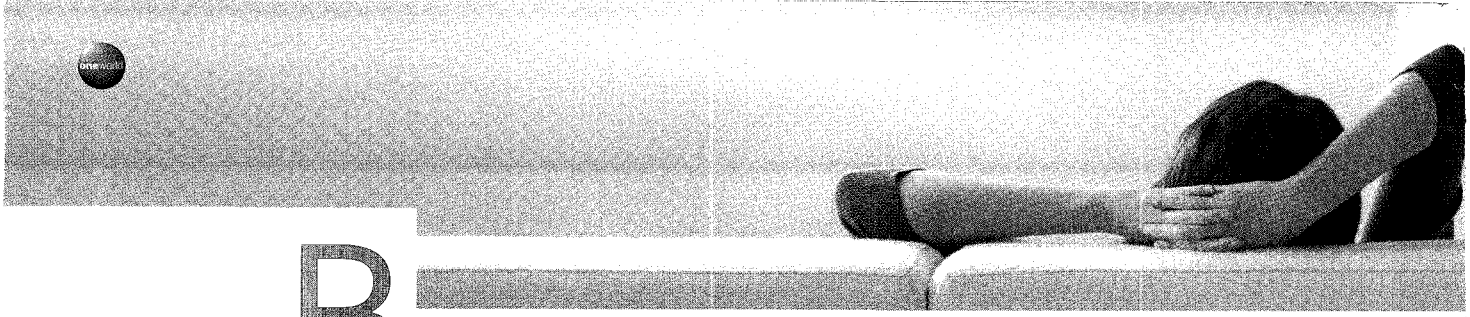

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